THE TERRIBLE HOBBY OF SIR JOSEPH LONDE, BART.

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By

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The Terrible Hobby of Sir Joseph Londe, Bart.

I

THE SCARLET PATCH

AT half-past twelve on a blustery morning in March, a middle-aged, neatly dressed man of powerful appearance, who had settled down in the neighbourhood under the name of Mr. Joseph Britton, turned into the main street of the small town of Dredley, in Surrey, pushed open the swing door of the offices of Messrs. Harrison & Co., land and house agents, and tapped on the mahogany counter with the crook of his stick. Mr. Harrison at once emerged from his private office. The two men exchanged greetings.

"I want to sell my house," Mr. Britton announced.

The house agent looked at his visitor over the top of his spectacles with some surprise.

"Why, Mr. Britton, I thought you'd settled down for life amongst us," he said, slowly drawing his ledger towards him. "You're not leaving the neighbourhood, I hope?"

"I'm having some trouble with my wife," the other explained; "she has worked herself up into a nervous state about these two extraordinary disappearances."

Mr. Harrison's expression was one of somewhat irritated concern.

"Come, that's too bad," he remonstrated. "If every one were to adopt that attitude, what would become of the price of property in the neighbourhood? Why, you'd ruin us all."

"I can't help the price of property," Mr. Britton replied coldly. "We've no children, and my wife's the only person I have to consider in the world. It's seeing the policemen about the lane, I expect, that has upset her."

"Take her away for a change, Mr. Britton," the house agent advised. "Don't you go throwing away a nice little property that you've just bought, because of a lady's spell of nervousness. Give her a month at Brighton, and she'll come back a different woman."

"I am afraid the matter is too serious for that," the other sighed. "I have no desire to part with the house, just having settled down; but I have given my word, and there we are. Take down the particulars."

"I don't need any," was the reluctant reply. "It isn't a couple of years since I sold you the place. What do you want for it?"

"I gave four thousand pounds for it," Mr. Britton reflected, "and they say property has increased in value. I'll consider any offer."

"Why, you must have spent hundreds upon the garden alone," Mr. Harrison remonstrated.

"A thousand pounds wouldn't cover what I've spent on the place, one way and another. All the same, I've

given my word of honour that down it goes into your books. If you don't sell it, I can't help it."

"Well, I'm glad the other residents aren't adopting your attitude," Mr. Harrison grumbled. "After all, these two disappearances might be cleared up at any moment. They may be entirely voluntary."

"That is precisely what I have pointed out to my wife," Mr. Britton acquiesced. "In my opinion the police are only advertising their incompetence by hanging about the place and making senseless enquiries. People don't disappear nowadays except of their own choice."

"I quite agree with you," the house agent concurred. "Lot of fuss about nothing, I call it. . . . Will you take a glass of sherry with me, Mr. Britton, before you go?"

"With pleasure!" was the courteous response.

The two men left the place together and entered the adjoining hotel. Dredley was one of those half urban, half suburban town-villages which mock the wayfarer from London who thinks that thirty miles from the metropolis should bring him to the country. The shops were mostly branches of larger establishments, and the hotel retained its kinship to a public house. The house agent and his client established themselves in hard, horsehair easy-chairs in an inner smoking room. The floor was covered with oilcloth, the walls hung with chromo advertisements. The young lady who waited upon them was affable but towny. With the second order for refreshments, she brought out a local newspaper.

"After all this fuss," she exclaimed, "Bert Endell's people have heard from him at Newcastle, where he's got a job, and Mr. Lancaster's written to his family from somewhere in London."

Mr. Harrison pounced upon the paper.

"That's right!" he exclaimed. "Well, I never! What about it now, Mr. Britton?"

"I should think that might possibly modify my wife's prejudice against the place," was the somewhat doubtful reply. "Keep the house on the books and I'll let you know."

The two men separated soon afterwards, and Mr. Joseph Britton walked homewards. He was a man apparently of early middle age, of medium height, powerful build, and inconspicuous appearance. He was clean-shaven, with black hair unstreaked with grey, massive jaw, firm mouth, but curiously restless eyes. Of his antecedents nobody knew anything, but his banker's reference had been unexceptionable, and his manners and speech were the attributes of a man of culture. The very pleasant residence which he had purchased some two years ago was situated on the side of the heath, about a mile and a half from the town. It was built of white stone, half-covered with creepers, and there was about an acre of garden, bounded on one side by a long and narrow footpath which crossed the heath and led into the town. Mr. Britton looked meditatively across at the rock garden, which was in the course of construction, as he rang his front doorbell. The idea was, without doubt, a good one. The proposed addition backed up against the thin hedge which separated the footpath from his

garden. It would, in time, shield the house from passers-by.

The door was opened by a manservant, sombrely dressed, and of uncouth and aggressive appearance. He took his master's hat and coat and glanced at the clock with an air of disapproval.

"Luncheon is on the table, sir," he announced gruffly.

Mr. Britton nodded and opened the door of the dining room. A woman who was already seated at the small round table looked up at his coming.

"Have you sold the house?" she asked eagerly.

"I have placed it in the agent's hands," he replied.

She continued her luncheon in silence—a striking-looking woman, if not beautiful, with pale cheeks, strange haunting eyes, and masses of beautiful brown hair. She was gazing steadfastly out of the window which looked on to the heath.

"It appears," he went on, "that both the disappearances which have been troubling the people of the neighbourhood are accounted for. The relatives of Mr. Lancaster have heard from him, and young Endell has written his mother from Newcastle."

His wife looked at him—a long and steady gaze from her wonderful eyes. She said nothing at all.

"It was in the local paper," he continued. "It will be in the London papers to-morrow."

The meal, served by the gloomy and taciturn manservant, was finished in silence. At its conclusion they made their way into a small library and seated themselves in easy-chairs before a huge log fire. Mr. Britton at once took up a book and became engrossed in

its contents. The woman neither read nor attempted any sort of needlework. There was no window open in the room, yet occasionally she shivered. She sat with her hands folded in front of her, her eyes sometimes fixed upon the fire, sometimes engaged in a steady contemplation of her husband's face. The latter remained completely absorbed. There was no attempt at conversation.

The day was cloudy and twilight came early. At five o'clock, the butler served tea, which was partaken of by the woman only. She drank three cups greedily. Then she left the room again. When she reappeared, she was wearing a handsome fur coat and a small, becoming hat with a veil, behind which her eyes seemed stranger and more beautiful than ever. Her husband gripped the sides of his chair and looked at her.

"You are going out?" he enquired.

"I am going to take a walk across the heath," she replied.

He rose slowly to his feet. For some reason or other, the statement seemed to affect him. He walked to the window and looked out. A belt of pine trees loomed like a black smudge at the end of the garden. The single trees and shrubs bordering the footpath had assumed chaotic shapes, more fanciful than ever by reason of the fantasies of a high wind. The footpath across the heath was dimly visible. A solitary tradesman's boy on a bicycle was making his way towards one of the large houses on the other side.

"It's a wild evening," he muttered.

The woman laughed, strangely but not unpleasantly.

"I love wind," she said, "wind and the falling darkness."

She left the room. The man remained at the window. He watched her cross the lawn, step over the strands of wire at the further end of the garden and pass along the footpath. He watched her slim form as she came into sight on the other side of the trees, moving with swift and effortless grace into the bosom of the darkness and the booming wind. Then he turned away, left the room, and, walking all the time with a curious mechanical effect, almost as though in a state of coma, he unlocked with a key from his chain the door of a small room behind the stairs. For a moment he paused to listen. Then he entered the room, closing the door behind him.

Daniel Rocke looked up from the desk in his newly acquired office, and gazed with some curiosity at his unexpected visitor. Miss Ann Lancaster subsided into the chair to which he had instinctively pointed, and laid her muff on the floor by her side.

"You remember me, Mr. Rocke?" she began.

"Quite well," he answered. "You were one of our cipher typists at the Foreign Office."

She nodded.

"I am still engaged there," she said.

There was a brief pause. Miss Lancaster seemed in no hurry to declare her mission, and Daniel Rocke, without displaying undue curiosity, was interested in renewing his impressions of her. At the Foreign Office she had just been one in a dozen, a little distinguished from the others, perhaps, only on account of

her superior intelligence. He had certainly never appreciated before the small, excellently shaped head, the glints of a richer colour in her deep brown hair, her clear hazel eyes and delicate eyebrows, her pale complexion, creamy rather than pallid. She was of medium height and slim figure, distinctly feminine, but with the subtle possession of poise. In the long, bare room at the Foreign Office, Rocke would never have glanced at her twice. Here, in his rather shabby little apartment at the top of a block of buildings in Shaftesbury Avenue, she was a different person.

She, too, from her point of view, found some interest in studying more closely this person whom she had come to visit. She remembered him merely as a man of about thirty-five years of age, of medium height, pallid-faced, with somewhat cynical mouth, and the fretful ways of a hypochondriac. He had the reputation of extreme cleverness, and he had more than once charmed the whole room by a rare but very delightful smile. His gracious moments, however, were very occasional, and the chief impression she had formed of him during their period of more or less close association, was of a man swift in intuition, capable, but short-tempered, a man with an indomitable capacity for mastering any obstacle which came in his way, but impatient of all delay or interruption.

"May I ask why you left the Foreign Office?" she enquired at last.

He raised his eyebrows very slightly. The question, coming in that form, surprised him.

"You may ask," he replied.

She was unperturbed.

"Impertinent of me, of course," she remarked, "but I am on serious business and my mind is filled with serious things. The report there was that, since the war, you had only been sent abroad four times, and that you were tired of doing nothing but decoding ciphers."

"The report, for once, was absolutely accurate," Rocke admitted.

"It was further reported," the girl continued, "that you were thinking of seeking a post in the Foreign Intelligence Department of Scotland Yard."

"That is where rumour failed," he replied. "If I am to take you into my confidence at all, I will tell you that I am weary of officialdom. And now, suppose you tell me what you have come to see me about?"

"Doesn't my name suggest my mission," she enquired—"Ann Lancaster?"

"Not in the slightest."

"You have read of the Dredley disappearances?"

"Yes," he acknowledged.

"My father was James Lancaster, the first one to go," she confided. "He went out for half-an-hour's walk on the heath whilst they were getting his supper ready, and never returned."

"But I thought that was all explained," he observed. "I thought that a letter had been received from your father, and also from the other young man who disappeared."

"That is where these 'mysterious disappearances,' as the Press used to call them, really do begin to be mysterious," the girl replied. "I have seen both letters. I know nothing about the young man who wrote

from Newcastle, but I am perfectly convinced that the communication which came to us with the postmark 'Bethnal Green' was neither typed nor dictated by my father."

"Have you the letter with you?" he asked.

She produced it—a half-sheet of common notepaper, on which the few sentences were roughly typed:

My dear wife and daughters,

I am in trouble and obliged to lie low for a few months. Do as well as you can without me. I have found some work in a quiet spot. I shall return before long.

Affectionately,

James Lancaster.

"You do not believe that this came from your father?" Rocke enquired.

"I am sure that it did not."

"Why?"

"My father was a quiet, home-loving man," she declared, "unadventurous and contented. I have been to see his employers. They were perfectly satisfied with him, and they scoffed at the idea of his being in any sort of discreditable trouble."

"Have you been to Scotland Yard?"

"Yes," she replied. "They were very noncommittal. They went so far as to tell me that half the mysterious disappearances we hear about are hoaxes. They took a copy of the letter and promised to make enquiries, but we are not able to offer a reward, and I am quite certain that they intend to do nothing further in the matter."

"What about the letter from the young man?" he asked.

"I borrowed that from his mother to show to you," she announced, producing another sheet of paper.

"Also typewritten," he murmured.

She nodded.

"Also, I believe, a fraud."

The letter was typed upon a sheet of expensive paper which might have been the stationery of a commercial firm of repute. The printed address at the top, and telephone number, had been cut out.

The letter itself consisted only of a single sentence:

To Mrs. Endell.

Madam,

Your son, Herbert Endell, has found employment with a firm in this town, and desires me to let you know that he is well and happy.

"No reasons for disappearance given, in either case," Rocke pointed out.

"None at all," she replied. "In my opinion, this letter is as fraudulent as the other one."

He laid them side by side upon his desk, and studied them for a moment. Then he folded them up and returned them to the girl.

"If one is to accept your theory," he remarked, "the fact of your father's disappearance, and this young man's, becomes more mysterious than ever."

"Quite true," she assented.

"What do you wish me to do about it?"

"Leave off decoding silly cipher messages and turn your attention to something worth while," she told

him bluntly. "I know a great deal about your work at the Foreign Office. It wasn't always what it seemed to be. It was you who tracked down Nicholas Green at Bristol——"

"That will do," he interrupted. "Tell me where I can communicate with you when I get there. I shall go down to Dredley by the next train."

"A gentleman to see over the house, sir," the uncouth-looking butler announced, ushering Daniel Rocke into the dining room of "Heathside", on the following afternoon.

Mr. Joseph Britton laid down the volume which he had been studying. His wife looked eagerly up from the depths of her easy-chair.

"I hope I have not called at an inconvenient time," Rocke observed. "Mr. Harrison, the agent, told me that I could see over the place at any hour."

"You are perfectly in order, sir," the tenant of "Heathside" declared courteously, as he rose to his feet. "I will show you over myself, with pleasure. The house has many good points, but my wife desires a change."

The woman looked across at their visitor. He was at once aware of the spell of her eyes.

"It is really my husband who wishes to travel," she said softly. "Am I to show Mr.——"

"Mr. Rocke," he put in.

"Mr. Rocke over the house, or will you, Joseph?"

"I will show him over myself," was the brusque reply.

Rocke fancied that there was a shadow of disap-

pointment in the woman's face as she resumed her task. Her husband, however, bustled him out of the room. The business of inspecting the upper rooms was soon concluded. Looking downward from the front bedroom, Mr. Britton noticed a taxicab standing outside.

"Is that your cab?" he asked.

The prospective tenant of "Heathside" nodded.

"I told him to wait."

Daniel Rocke's close watch for anything in the least unusual connected with these two people—the only residents in the vicinity who seemed suddenly anxious to change their quarters—was at last rewarded. There was a look of almost venomous disappointment in his companion's face as he gazed down at the harmless taxicab. It was an expression which lingered only for a moment, but it was unmistakable. Daniel Rocke, affecting to notice nothing, turned away.

"Rather lazy of me not to walk up," he remarked, "but I had eighteen holes at golf this morning, and want to finish up with a little practice later on.—I shall be interested to see what accommodation you have on the ground floor."

"My wife and I are quiet people," Mr. Britton explained, as he led the way downstairs, "and we live nearly altogether in the dining room and my small study. This is the drawing-room, however—a fine room, but we've never properly furnished it. This is my study," he added, showing a small apartment, the walls of which were lined with bookcases. "Cosy, as you see, but a little cramped."

Daniel Rocke was examining the volumes.

"Are you a medical man, Mr. Britton?" he asked, pointing to one of the rows of books.

"Only an amateur," was the curt reply. "Come along."

"Interested in Australia too, I see," his visitor continued, pausing before another shelf. "A Colonist, by any chance?"

"No!" was the short rejoinder. "The books were an inheritance.—Would you like to see the gardens now?"

"What is this room?" Daniel enquired, pausing before the door with the Yale lock.

"Little more than a cupboard. I keep some oddments there—golf clubs and things."

Daniel measured with his eye the distance between the door of the next room and the window on the left.

"It must be a very large cupboard," he remarked. "Can I have a look at it?"

"Next time you call, with pleasure," the other replied. "As a matter of fact, I have mislaid the key."

Daniel nodded. He seemed indifferent about the matter, but he added another fact to his little store.

"The gardens aren't much; but perhaps you would like to see them," his companion suggested, leading the way out of doors.

On the whole, they certainly justified their tenant's criticism. In the corner near the footpath, however, a very elaborate rock garden was in course of erection.

"You've put in a lot of work there," Daniel observed thoughtfully.

"I have indeed," was the somewhat grudging reply. "Dug every foot of the ground with my own

hands. Waste of time too, I'm inclined to think now. If I were buying the place, I'd pull it down and make a hard tennis court on the top."

"A capital idea," Daniel assented. "Your agent asked me four thousand pounds for the house. Is that your lowest?"

"Not if price is a material object," Mr. Britton answered, with ill-concealed eagerness. "The fact of it is, we want to get away. My wife is nervous. She wants a change, and at once. I'd like to make a clean job of it, if I could."

"If I decide to buy the house, I will make you an offer, then, through Mr. Harrison," Daniel promised.

"Why not clinch the business now?" the other suggested.

Daniel shook his head, smiling, as he stepped into his waiting taxicab.

"You shall have definite news in the morning," he assured him.

Daniel Rocke caught a fast train to town, and arrived at a great public office at half-past three. He made his way to a department which had flourished hugely during the war, but which was now considerably reduced in numbers and was in fact in process of reconstruction. The Chief, Colonel Sir Francis Worton, K.C.B., D.S.O., received him as an old friend.

"What brings you here, Daniel?" he enquired, pushing across a box of cigarettes.

"I came to ask for your help," was the prompt reply. "Give me a clean sheet of blotting-paper, will you?—That's right. Now let me have sixty seconds to complete this work of art."

With a few deft touches he produced a very reasonable likeness of Mr. Joseph Britton.

"Look here," he continued, "I am in search of a man, probably a criminal, who served through the war in some capacity or other, who was probably an Australian, and from whose hands, and other evidence, I should gather was either a doctor or a surgeon. He is living with his wife in Surrey, and that is an impression of him."

The Chief glanced at the sketch and nodded approvingly.

"Great gift, that, Daniel," he declared. "Certainly, I can tell you the man's name and all about him."

"Get on with it, please, then. The matter is urgent."

"If it's a criminal affair, or anything of that sort, you are going to be disappointed," Sir Francis warned his visitor. "That is a picture of Joseph Londe, the Australian surgeon, who was given a baronetcy by the King. He was one of the first of the really great surgeons of the world in——"

"Tell me about it?" Daniel begged.

"He rigged up a sort of travelling Field Hospital for operations, and they say that, during the Mons *débâcle* he sometimes had as many as sixty or seventy bad cases on his hands at a time. Nothing seemed to tire him. He was three years out there—but then, of course, you've read about him. Very few people know the end of his story, however."

"Tell it me at once, please."

Sir Francis sighed.

"It was very sad," he continued. "One night, after a simply terrible seven or eight hours' work—it was

in that Cambrai affair—Londe and his head nurse both went raving mad. They hushed it all up, but he killed two men before they could get hold of him. He and the nurse were both brought home to an asylum somewhere near London. It was only last year I heard that they were discharged as cured."

"And what became of them?"

"I believe that they went quietly back to Australia."

Daniel rose to his feet.

"I'm immensely obliged, Worton," he acknowledged. "If you'll lunch with me at the club, the day after to-morrow, I'll tell you all about it."

"Done, my lad," was the hearty response. "One o'clock sharp, mind. I'm on duty again at two."

Daniel found time to call at his rooms, where he slipped a small revolver into his pocket. He then caught the next available train to Dredley, where, on the platform, he had a few very fortunate words with Miss Ann Lancaster. Afterwards, he took a taxicab direct to the Golf Club, drank a whisky and soda, and, with half a dozen balls in his pocket and a mashie in his hand, strolled out to a distant part of the course. In time he reached a green bordering the straight footpath which bisected the heath and stretched to Dredley. He spent some little time practising short approaches. Then he stood up and looked reflectively down the path. A woman was coming towards him, veiled and cloaked, yet unmistakable. He devoted himself assiduously to a series of wrist shots, and was just collecting the balls, which he had played on to the green, when the woman paused. He looked up. Once

more the spell of her eyes was upon him. He raised his hat.

"Come and talk to me," she invited. "It must be too dark for you to play. I want to know whether you are really thinking about the house?"

They strolled back together, side by side. The woman's voice was pleasant, almost caressing.

"I am so anxious," she told him, "to know whether there is any chance of your buying 'Heathside.' I want to get away. This place is beginning to stifle me. I can't sleep. Do you know what it is not to be able to sleep, Mr. Rocke?"

"Often," he answered, "during the war."

She started. For a single moment there was somethin approaching horror in her pale face.

"If I were to let myself think of those days," she continued softly, "I should never sleep again. If I were to think of the shrieks of agony, the horrible sights they brought in from the firing line, I should go mad."

"You were in France?" he asked.

"Yes!" she answered briefly, with the air of one wishing to abandon the subject. "Mr. Rocke, buy our house. He gave four thousand pounds for it. Offer him three—two—anything! I cannot stay here any longer."

They had reached that part of the footpath now which bordered the gardens of "Heathside" on one hand, and the gardens of another house on the other. The twilight was merging into darkness. Daniel was a brave man, but he suddenly wished that he had adopted different tactics. His hand stole into the

pocket where his revolver lay concealed. He felt her fingers slip underneath his other arm.

"Men don't understand nerves," she whispered. "I am afraid—afraid of life! I want some one strong."

Her fingers tore at her throat. Something fell glittering on to the path. He stopped to pick it up. There was a sound like whistling close to his ears, a jerk around his neck, a sense of stifling. He was vaguely conscious of a man stepping over the wire strand from the garden of "Heathside", something was held to his nose, he seemed enveloped by an odour, partly of faded flowers, partly suggestive of an anæsthetic. Then the house began to move towards him, the shrubs passed him in solemn procession, an open door swallowed him up into a black gulf. He was in the hall of the house he had called to inspect earlier in the day. He was in the room behind the stairs, the door of which Britton had opened with a Yale key. He was lying down. The sense of suffocation began to pass, his head grew clearer, only his limbs seemed numbed. The control of his tongue came back.

"What the devil are you up to?" he cried weakly.

Britton turned round from the cupboard with a long, black case in his hand. He spread it out upon a table—a case of surgical instruments, with tempered blue steel glittering in the electric light. He had taken off his coat and put on a white linen duster. He looked at his victim with placid content through the lenses of a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Capital! Capital!" he exclaimed. "I really believe—I honestly believe that you are the man I have been seeking for years."

"What the mischief do you want with me?" Daniel demanded, trying in vain to sit up.

"Just to have a look at your brain," was the pleasant reply.

"My—my what?" Daniel gasped.

"Your brain," the other repeated, taking one of the knives from the box and examining it critically. "By the by, you know who I am, of course? I am Sir Joseph Londe, the greatest surgeon in the world. I have performed more operations than there are stars in the sky. Unfortunately, one day a small portion of my brain went red. There was a great deal of red about in those days. You are not a medical man, I believe?"

"No!"

"Useless to try and explain to you, then," Londe continued affably. "As a matter of fact, so long as I cannot replace that little portion of red brain, I am mad. They had to put me in an asylum for two years, and I may have to go back again some day, unless I can find a man with a natural-coloured brain, from which I can help myself. I've tried two—miserable subjects they were—scarlet patches all over. In you, however, I have absolute confidence."

"How are you going to get at my brain?" Daniel found strength to ask.

"Cut it out, of course," the other explained. "You needn't have the least alarm. I am the greatest operator in the world."

"And what do you do with me afterwards?"

The surgeon chuckled.

"Bury you in the rock garden," he replied. "I call

it my cemetery. Now, if you will be so kind as to stay quite still——"

"Stop!" Daniel insisted, struggling to hide his terror. "I am interested in new discoveries. I must know what that stuff was that you gave me to smell?"

His torturer smiled.

"I am almost as versed in the by-ways of science as I am infallible with the knife," he confided. "That stuff is an invention of my own. Its results are more wonderful than any anæsthetic, but it has no deleterious effect upon the brain. You can understand all that I say, and you can even converse with me. Yet you could not move either your arm or your foot more than an inch or two."

"How long—does its influence last?"

"About another ten minutes. That reminds me, I must not waste any more time. The last subject I had was not nearly so well-mannered as you. I left it a little too late, and I had to use very violent means to keep him quiet."

The surgeon took a step forward. The knife shone before Daniel's horrified eyes like a line of silver. He tried to shout, but his voice rose scarcely above a whisper. He felt the touch of those cool, strong fingers on the back of his head. It must surely be the end!

At the very last moment came an unexpected respite. Heavy footsteps had passed the closely curtained window. The bell of the front door pealed through the house.

"You had better see who that is," Daniel faltered. "It may be some one with a better brain than mine."

The surgeon crept stealthily to the window. When he came back, his face was ghastly. He replaced the knife, and locked the case up in the cupboard from which he had taken it, hung up his duster and changed back again into his tweed coat. Then he looked at Daniel and his expression was terrible. The glitter of cunning had crept into his eyes—cunning and fear.

"I shall have to leave you, my poor fellow," he said harshly. "There are hundreds who need me more. I am called away—a worse case."

Again the summons of the bell pealed through the house. Londe hesitated no longer. He stole from the room, closing the door quietly behind him. Daniel found himself able to move his arms and legs a little. He swung himself into a sitting posture. Again the bell rang. He heard the sound of stealthy voices in the hall, then silence, after which he fancied that he heard a far-away door opened and closed. The ringing of the bell now became more and more imperative. He dragged himself to the window. There were two policemen there—and Ann. He managed to tap it feebly. Soon they heard him. He caught a glimpse of Ann's terrified face outside. Then one of the policemen forced the long window with a clasp knife. They were all in the room. Daniel was just able to stand now, and his voice was almost steady.

"Britton's a lunatic!" he gasped. "Get him if you can. I should have been a dead man in sixty seconds!"

The policemen hurried off. Ann remained.

"Are you hurt?" she asked quickly.

"Stupefied—with some drug," he explained. "The

man is one of the worst type of madmen. What made you come?"

She smiled a little wanly.

"I felt that you were doing a foolish thing," she said. "I watched at the other end of the footpath. I saw you throw up your arms as though you had a fit, and disappear into this garden. I knew it was no use coming alone, so I rushed down to the police station."

"You've saved my life," he muttered.

"You risked yours on my information," she reminded him.

"I never thought the fellow could be such a fiend. Listen!"

They heard the tramp of the police through the empty house, the opening and closing of doors, voices muttering—but the men came back unsuccessful. The two tragical figures—the great surgeon and his nurse—had passed out once more into the world of shadows.

Ann Lancaster was again seated in the easy-chair drawn up to the side of Daniel Rocke's desk. She was in deep mourning; the secret of the rock garden had been blazoned out to a horrified world. Even a Press, greedy for sensation, had glossed over some of the details of that gruesome discovery, and the identity of the man and woman was not as yet disclosed.

"Still no news?" she asked.

"Nothing beyond the usual crop of absurd rumours," he grumbled. "I am in touch with a friend who will let me know directly there is a real discovery."

"I should have thought," she observed, "that the cleverest criminal in the world would have found it impossible to slip away from a place like Dredley and vanish—especially with a woman. That a lunatic should be able to do so, with the whole of the police force of England hot-foot after him, seems amazing."

"Londe is only a lunatic upon one point," Daniel reminded her. "He is obsessed with the idea of replacing a portion of his own brain with that of another man. Apart from that, I believe he is just as brilliant as ever. That's what makes him so horribly dangerous."

She shivered.

"And the woman?"

"She was his favourite nurse, and she went mad precisely when he did. Her madness to-day consists solely in believing that what he desires is possible."

"Is she really his wife?" Ann asked curiously.

"They were discharged from different asylums within a week of one another." Daniel replied. "They met in London and were married by special licence. It was understood that they were leaving at once for Australia."

"And somewhere or other," Ann went on with a little shiver, "they are free. He is sharpening his knife for his next victim, and the lure in her eyes is there, waiting!"

"Are you going to keep your post at the Foreign Office?" Daniel asked, a little abruptly.

"I hope not," she answered. "Why?"

"I am starting affairs on my own account," Daniel announced. "Will you accept a post with me?"

"What are your affairs?" she enquired.

"I have made a bungler's start," he admitted, "but there is a new department of Home Secret Service being established—the head of it is the friend I spoke of—and we are going to find Londe. I am also pledged to help him in any other of his cases where my assistance may be of service. Then, of course, there is my day-by-day work of decoding cipher manuscripts. I do that for any one who chooses to employ me. The Foreign Office still send me their work."

"I was getting fifty-five shillings," she confided. "I can live on that, but I should like sixty."

"There will be no difficulty about that," he assented. "You'll find the work tedious at times—you'll have to help with the decoding when there's nothing else doing."

"I don't mind that," she assured him. "There is just one thing which will reconcile me to any amount of drudgery."

He looked at her curiously. For all her charm, he realised that she was a very determined young woman.

"You know what it is," she continued, after a moment's pause. "Some day you may get on the track of that man—and there may be a chance of helping."

He nodded.

"I understand. Try and start here on Monday morning, please."

II

THE TERROR OF ELTON LODGE

COLONEL SIR FRANCIS WORTON, K.C.B., D.S.O., officially known amongst professional intimates, since the formal inauguration of his new Department, as Q 20, stood before the open window of Daniel Rocke's office, looking out across the incongruous medley of roof tops, chimneys and sky signs. A sudden burst of spring had deluged the city with sunshine. Daffodils and mimosa were being sold at the street corners, the sky was of summer blue, across which drifted lazily fleecy little fragments of white cloud.

"If I were anybody in the world but my unlucky self," he sighed, "I should take a long week-end and play golf at Rye. Upsetting weather, this!"

Daniel glanced out of the window without enthusiasm.

"Beastly treacherous," he muttered. "The east wind may come back to-morrow."

"Pessimist!" his Chief scoffed. "By the by, Dan, that's a ripping good-looking typist of yours."

"Is she?" Daniel answered coldly. "I can't say I ever noticed her particularly."

Q 20 swung round and looked at his friend.

"Liver or the blues?" he enquired.

"Both," was the prompt acknowledgment. "I want some work."

"There's plenty doing," Worton replied, "only I don't want to set you fishing for minnows. I like to keep you comfortably in the background for the big fish. There's plenty doing, of course. Anarchy and love-making both flourish in the spring."

"All the same, you didn't walk across the park to come and see me at this time of the morning for nothing, did you?" Daniel persisted.

"I did not," his visitor admitted.

"Get along with it, then. I've done nothing but cipher and decoding work for ages. I can't stand any more of it."

"The affair to which I am about to allude," Q 20 remarked cautiously, "does not come within the sphere of our professional activities. You, however, are a free lance. It might interest you."

"Proceed," Daniel begged.

"This remarkably good-looking secretary of yours —let me see, what did you say her name was?"

"I'm not aware that I mentioned it," Daniel answered stiffly. "It is, as a matter of fact, Lancaster —Miss Ann Lancaster."

"Know anything of her antecedents?"

"I know of a very tragic incident in her life. She is the daughter of the man who was murdered by that lunatic Londe."

Q 20 whistled softly.

"The fellow who nearly did you in! The girl got you out of a tight place, didn't she?"

"I have always considered myself indebted to Miss

Lancaster for her services on that occasion," Daniel acknowledged with some reserve.

"Then you'd better ask her what she means by dining in the Ronico Grill Room with a well-known criminal," his friend suggested—"a man who is badly wanted by Scotland Yard."

Daniel was amazingly perturbed.

"Dining alone with him?" he demanded.

Q 20 nodded.

"We don't make mistakes," he said, a little coldly. "I suppose I ought to give Scotland Yard the tip, but I'm not going to, just at present. I have an idea that the young man is in touch, or getting into touch, with my little lot."

"Has this been going on for long?" Daniel asked.

"About a fortnight. I can tell you all about it, for I was having the young man closely shadowed at the time. They met at a tea shop. He sent a card over to her. She was on the point of tearing it up when she seemed to change her mind. She examined the card more closely, put it in her bag, looked across at the man and smiled.—These women are the devil," Worton went on, with a sigh. "Scarcely lifts her eyes when I wish her the most respectful 'Good morning'."

"And since then?"

"She's dined with him at least three times, always in the Ronico Grill. Once she went to the cinema afterwards. They were there on Tuesday. When they came out, they stood talking in the street for nearly ten minutes. He seemed to be trying to persuade her to go somewhere."

"The devil!" Daniel exclaimed, with cold fury.

"She went off home by herself, all right," Q 20 reassured him—"Girls' Hostel in Sydney Street, Westminster. All right up to now, I should say, but she's flirting with danger. Look into it, Dan, and find out what that young man is at. He's a bad lot and I want him."

Colonel Sir Francis Worton picked up his grey Homburg hat, his stick and his gloves.

"I am always to be found at the club, after hours," he concluded. "Keep in touch with me, there's a good fellow."

Daniel, distinctly disturbed and ill at ease, bade his friend a somewhat incoherent farewell. The door of the outer office had scarcely closed before he rang the bell. Ann appeared at once. He swung round in his chair and looked at her. For the first time he seemed to realise how little he actually knew of his new secretary. Her quietness of demeanour, her habit of reserved speech, all made for secrecy. She stood just where a little flood of the sunshine, which had so disturbed his previous visitor, sought out the beauty of her dark brown hair, with its threads and splashes of gold. She waited attentively, a notebook and pencil in her hand.

"You rang, sir," she reminded him.

Daniel pulled himself together.

"Won't you sit down for a moment, Miss Lancaster," he invited.

She hesitated and then obeyed him.

"I am aware," he went on, a little stiffly, "that it is not customary to interfere with the private life of one's assistants; but I have this morning received

information of a somewhat distressing character."

"About me?" Ann enquired.

"About you. I am told that you are in the habit of dining with a well-known criminal, a man whom you met by chance in a tea room."

Ann's attitude towards the accusation was distinctly unexpected. A light of positive pleasure flashed in her soft brown eyes, her lips parted in an eager smile.

"Is he really a criminal?" she demanded.

"I have it on the best authority," was the curt reply.

"Then I have not been wasting time," she declared, with a sigh of satisfaction.

Daniel looked at her for a moment in blank surprise.

"Perhaps you would care to explain?" he suggested.

"Willingly," she answered. "You have become immersed in other interests and you have forgotten the man who came within five seconds of taking your life. I have never forgotten my father's murderer."

"You mean to say that you are on his track?" Daniel demanded, incredulously.

"That is my hope," she assented. "It is quite true that I made this man's acquaintance in a tea room. He sent me over a card on which was scribbled an impertinent message. I was on the point of tearing it up when I saw that the name printed upon it had been crossed out. Even then I fancied that I could read it. Now, in the clear light, it is quite legible."

She drew a crumpled card from a letter case in her pocket, and handed it to him. He held it up to the light. A little exclamation broke from his lips.

"Sir Joseph Londe!" he cried.

She nodded.

"When I found," she went on, "that the young man who sought to make my acquaintance was in possession of cards bearing that name—well, I encouraged him. I have dined with him two or three times, and been to the cinema with him."

"Have you ever referred to Londe?" Daniel enquired.

"Certainly not," she answered. "He is very clever. I am not in the least surprised to hear that he is a criminal. The very fact that he is a bad character makes it all the more likely that he may be connected in some way with that man."

"Has he disclosed any design with regard to you, other than flirtation?" Daniel asked.

"He is working up to it," Ann answered eagerly. "He is always admiring my hair. At first I took no notice of it, but he has been so persistent that I became suspicious. Only the other night, he asked me if anything would induce me to have it cut off and sell it."

"For what purpose?"

"He said something about a wealthy woman who seems to be connected with his uncle, somehow or other," she replied. "Anyway, his uncle appears to be the intermediary. I laughed at him, but I am quite sure that there is something at the back of his mind."

"Nothing that he has ever said has suggested the existence of Londe, I suppose?"

"I am not sure," she reflected. "He has spoken once or twice of a very wealthy uncle—a professional man."

"When do you see him again?"

"I am dining with him to-night."

"At Ronico's again?"

She shook her head.

"No! To-night we are going to Imano's. I think his idea is that it will be more intimate."

Daniel frowned. He was utterly unable to account for a certain irritation which betrayed itself at once in his tone.

"You seem to find his society amusing, anyhow."

"I try to," she confessed simply. "I am hoping every time that he may give me the clue."

"And do you propose, may I ask," he went on, "to proceed with these investigations yourself?"

"Not necessarily. If you can suggest any form of intervention, I should be only too glad to share the responsibility," she assured him.

"Before this evening," Daniel promised, "I will collect a little more information about this young man. What does he call himself?"

"Mr. Leopold Greatson."

"Good-looking?" Daniel asked querulously.

"Of his type," she admitted—"tall with small, military, black moustache and very black eyes."

"Good manners?"

"On the surface," she answered, after a moment's hesitation.

"Voice?"

"Also a little artificial."

Daniel showed signs of cheering up.

"Don't leave without seeing me this evening," he enjoined. "I'll have his *dossier* by then."

She shivered a little.

"Don't show it to me," she begged, "or I shall be afraid to go near him."

Daniel smiled in peculiar fashion.

"You will not be alone," he promised.

Miss Ann Lancaster, seated at one of the small balcony tables upstairs at Imano's, looking quite at her best, and with a great bunch of violets by the side of her plate, tried to persuade herself that she was enjoying her dinner. Her companion was, in his way, sufficiently good-looking and was certainly attentive. The dinner was the best the place could afford, a gold-topped bottle reposed in ice by their side, and an excellent little orchestra was discoursing soft and pleasant music. Most of the concomitants of a pleasant evening were there, yet a queer feeling had come to Ann. For the first time in her life, she knew fear. Every now and then, her companion leaned across the table towards her to whisper words of admiration. Each time she smiled back at him, but each time it became more difficult. Whenever he dropped his voice she felt inclined to shriek, and he dropped it more and more often as the dinner drew to a close. Whilst they were waiting for their coffee, he leaned across the table until their heads nearly touched.

"Ann," he began——

"I have not given you permission to call me Ann," she interrupted.

"You soon will," he continued—"very soon, indeed, I hope, after you have heard what I have to say. First of all, I will make a confession. I have spoken

to you three or four times of my uncle. He is not my uncle at all."

"You mean the rich old misanthrope who wants my hair?" Ann demanded.

He nodded.

"I think that he is a little mad," he confided. "I will tell you the truth about the matter. He has a wife whom no one ever sees, whose hair he believes to be perfectly white, although as a matter of fact it is exactly the same colour as your own. She had a shock some time ago. All the while he is looking for some one with exactly your coloured hair. He is a clever man—a scientist, they say—but he is mad. He thinks that he will be able to graft the hair on to his wife's head, and that, when she sees her hair the right colour again, she will recover her health and spirits."

"What an extraordinary story!" Ann murmured.

"It is true—I give you my word that it is true," the young man assured her earnestly. "Now I will tell you something else. I told you that he would give a hundred pounds for your hair. He will give more —he will give a great deal more. When I first talked to you about it, I thought of nothing except to make something for myself. Now I know you better, I have another idea. Let us take all that he will give and go abroad together. We can be married—you can trust me, I promise that—and we can go to a little place in the southwest of France that I know of. I could practise there as a doctor. I took my degree all right, but I never had the money to set up. Your hair will grow there quite quickly, and you will be away from everybody. What do you think of my plan?"

"I don't know," Ann confessed. "You never told me that you were a doctor."

"I am a doctor; but there was some trouble when I was an assistant to a man in the East End," he explained. "You see, I am quite honest with you. I should find it difficult to practise in this country. Abroad it would be all right, and with the thousand pounds——"

"You mean to say that this man is going to give a thousand pounds for my hair?" she interrupted.

The young man looked annoyed. His mouth moved sideways—an ugly trick he had at times.

"I was coming to that," he said. "Yes, he will give a thousand pounds."

"What is his name?" Ann asked.

"Warking—Doctor Joseph Warking."

"What is he like?"

"A quaint-looking cove, of medium height, dark, and with massive shoulders. Looks very clever. Honestly, I know very little about him, but I know that he means business about that thousand pounds. I've taken two girls there before you, but their hair was much lighter than yours and he turned them down directly. The money was in his desk waiting, though."

"How are you sure that mine is the right colour?" she persisted.

"I've seen his wife," he explained. "The colour of her hair, although he believes it to be white, is precisely the same as yours."

"Why doesn't he advertise, or come out and look for some one himself?" Ann demanded.

"I told you he was a quaint sort of cove with his silly delusions," her companion replied; "but he's quainter than you'd believe. He's hired a gloomy house the other side of Putney Common—took it furnished from the executors of a doctor who died there. I arranged the whole matter for him, and, if you believe me, he hasn't been out of that house since the first day he arrived in it—out of the grounds, I should say," he corrected himself. "He does play about at a little gardening at times—talks about making a rock garden."

Ann clutched at the tablecloth. For a moment the atmosphere of the place, her companion, the busy forms of the waiters, seemed all fantastic and unreal. She heard the sobbing of the night wind in the pine trees and saw Daniel Rocke coming along the shadowy path, side by side with the woman with the strange eyes. She no longer had any doubt.

"Well, what do you think of my scheme?" the young man asked, after a little pause.

"It sounds all right," Ann admitted, "only I am not sure that I know you well enough."

"Since I saw you that day in the tea shop," he declared impressively, "I have never looked at any other girl—that's straight. You can trust me. I haven't many friends, but the few I can introduce you to will tell you that Leopold Greatson can be trusted. Honour bright, I never saw a girl come anywhere near you! what I'd like to do," he went on confidentially, "is to touch the money this very night and clear right away. Are you game for that, Ann?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," she answered. "I shall look a horrid sight without any hair."

"Don't you believe it," the young man rejoined emphatically. "You can wear a hat most of the time, and one of those fussy little boudoir caps in the house. You'll look all right for me, Ann—I promise you that. It will be fine to get out of this country too," he went on. "I don't seem to be able to do any good here at anything. When you've once been in trouble, it's so jolly difficult to get going again."

"Do you want me to visit this strange friend of yours to-night, then?" she asked.

"I should like to start off to see him in ten minutes," was the prompt reply. "I'm all the time afraid that he'll change his mind, or that some one else will come along with your coloured hair."

"How far away is it?"

"Three or four miles."

"Tell me exactly where it is," Ann persisted.

"It's a house called Elton Lodge—an old-fashioned place near the Portsmouth Road," he confided. "It would take us about twenty-five minutes in a taxi. He's got the money waiting there in notes! We might have a little supper afterwards, to celebrate, and make our plans."

"Idiot!" she exclaimed. "I should have to arrange something for my head before I could wear a hat, even."

"All the more reason for getting right away at once," he argued eagerly.

"Well, we'll talk about that afterwards," Ann

promised. "Anyhow, I am willing to go and see your eccentric friend."

"You'll come there now with me, then?"

Ann nodded.

"I suppose so," she sighed. "I'm tired of typing. And a thousand pounds! I shan't believe it until I feel the notes in my hand."

He called for the bill and, while the waiter was bringing it, dropped his voice almost to a whisper.

"Ann," he pleaded, "you'll play the game? You won't pinch the thousand and then have nothing more to do with yours truly? You'll act on the square?"

"Yes," Ann assured him, "I'll act on the square."

The young man received and paid his bill. Ann rose to her feet with a little grimace.

"I'll fetch my coat and have one last look at my hair," she murmured, as she disappeared from view.

In the dreary library of a large, dilapidated house, a man sat at a writing table, motionless, apparently idle. There were patches of damp upon the walls, half of the shelves with which the room had been lined had been torn down, the few books that remained were mouldy and damp to the touch. The carpet had been taken up and replaced with a temporary drugget. Even the fire which burned in the grate seemed made of green logs, which sizzled and spluttered and gave out little heat. Most of the electric fittings in the room had been dismantled. One lamp alone stood upon the desk, unshaded and glaring. The face of the man seemed relentlessly framed in its circle of white light

—a strange, powerful face, sallow and sombre, clean-shaven, with black hair in which was no streak of grey. He had the air of a man waiting there for a purpose, idle yet attentive. Suddenly his whole expression changed. From outside came the sound of the swinging of a gate, the noise of a taxicab, the flash of its lamps passing the window. A strange, almost a beautiful smile parted his lips for a moment. He half rose to his feet, eagerly. Then he resumed his place and waited.

There followed the sound of footsteps in the stone hall outside. The door of the room was opened, and the visitors entered. The man who had been waiting rose to his feet.

"I have brought the young lady, sir," Leopold Greatson announced. "She is a little frightened. I think she'd like you to explain the matter to her."

Ann raised her eyes and gave a start. The man whom she had come to see was not even looking at her. His eyes were fixed greedily upon her hair.

"Take off your hat, please," he begged.

She obeyed. He gave a little sigh of relief as the garish light shone upon the misty film of gold with its darker background.

"My dear young lady," he said, "your hair is wonderful. It is precisely the shade for which I have been seeking. This young man has, I trust, informed you of my offer?"

"He has," she answered.

Leopold Greatson came up to the table, almost pushing his way past Ann.

"In a sense, although it's not my hair, we are

partners in this," he declared. "We want the money before the hair is touched."

The prospective purchaser produced his pocketbook.

"It is your wish?" he asked Ann.

"No!" she answered.

Leopold Greatson struck the table with his fist.

"It was a bargain," he declared thickly.

"It was no bargain," Ann retorted. "I wanted to be brought here. I listened to what you had to say, but I promised nothing."

There was a curious light in the older man's eyes—almost a twinkle.

"I shall pay the money when the hair is mine," he pronounced. "There is the commission I promised," he added, drawing a note from his pocketbook. "You had better go and leave the young lady alone with me. We can finish our business together."

Greatson pocketed the note ungraciously.

"You're backing out, then?" he complained, turning to Ann. "Mind, it wasn't the money only. I'd taken a fancy to you."

She waved him away. Her gesture was insignificant, but he understood that he was a thing of no account. The girl's eyes seldom left the face of the man whom she had come to visit.

"Don't you want me to take you home?" Leopold Greatson persisted.

"I never want to see you again," she replied.

He went out, grumbling, and slammed the door behind him. The sound of the echoes seemed to awaken a sense of loneliness for the first time in Ann's mind. She had the courage of a lioness, and her

trust in Daniel was immense; but she suddenly realised that she was alone with a lunatic and a murderer.

"I am glad to get rid of that young man," her companion remarked cheerfully. "I do not know why, but he displeases me.—Ah! Now you are going to see why I am parting with all this money—for your hair."

A door on the further side of the room had opened. Fear crept into Ann's heart as she saw the newcomer—a tall, slim woman, pale-faced, with strange, large eyes and hair as beautiful as her own. She was wearing the uniform of a nurse. She seemed, somehow or other, a handmaiden of Death.

"Is everything prepared?" the man asked.

"Everything is ready," was the quiet reply.

A momentary passion drove the fear from Ann's heart. The sight of the woman in her nurse's garb was illuminative. She knew now, beyond the shadow of doubt, that she had found her father's murderer.—She rose to her feet.

"Listen, both of you!" she exclaimed. "Do you know who I am?"

"I am more interested," he assured her gently, "in the colour of your hair."

"I am Ann Lancaster," she proclaimed, her eyes blazing. "I am the daughter of the man you murdered! I am here not to sell my hair, but because, through it, I have tracked you down! Do you hear that?"

He smiled at her benignly.

"Well, well, that really doesn't matter, does it?" he answered soothingly. "I remember your father now

perfectly—a most amiable man, but, alas! I am afraid, a coward. The fuss he made about parting with a little of his brain was quite pitiable.—You remember, Esther?" he added, turning to the woman who was standing by his side like a wraith.

"Quite well," she admitted. "He gave us a great deal of trouble."

"And, after all," Londe sighed, "he was useless. His brain was a very poor affair. Now the young man who behaved so badly to us—Daniel Rocke, I think his name was—he, I feel sure, would have been a most satisfactory subject."

A fierce curiosity conquered for a moment Ann's terror.

"What did you expect to get from these people?" she demanded.

"A very intelligent question," Londe answered approvingly. "You see, my wife here and I—she wasn't my wife then—were right up to the line in France and Belgium for many, many months. I lived with a knife in my hand, and she with bandages. Night and day we were there. If I sought a moment's sleep, I was awakened by the screaming—and they came and fetched me. We were short of anæsthetics. We were short of everything. Blood—you never saw anything like it! We lived in it, and, somehow or other, a drop of it got into my brain. I went to a physician. I knew it was there because I could see it with the X-rays. He told me that nothing would cure me but to find another brain of the same formation as mine, but a natural colour, and remove a small portion of it to take the place of the discoloured part

of my own. I dare say it was good advice, but I couldn't find another brain that hadn't got a similar smudge of red in it. I tried several subjects, as you know. The third was too selfish. People misunderstood us, so we had to go away. Then there came the question of this exchange of hair. My wife was afraid that you would be like these cowardly men and make difficulties about it. Directly I saw you, though, I knew there was no fear of that."

Ann's hand went instinctively to her head.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

He smiled.

"I am a very clever man," he confided, "a great scientist. I know better than to try and cut your hair off and have a hairdresser deal with it. What I shall do—it will be a very interesting operation—I shall take the scalp with it and graft it on to my wife's head. Then your hair will grow just as it is growing now."

"It is exactly the colour mine was," the woman murmured, looking fixedly at Ann—"exactly the colour mine seems even now to me. It will be wonderful."

The hideous sense of unreality which had enveloped Ann, began to pass away. The consciousness of her imminent danger, however, was no more consoling. She was alone and in the power of two lunatics.

"What about me—after you have taken my—my hair?" she faltered.

The man smiled.

"That is all arranged for," he answered consolingly. "You remember my little rock garden at Dredley? I have started something similar here. It is really a very

retired spot, although we are so near the highway."

She sat perfectly silent, incredulous, stupefied. The calm explanation, the entire air of reasonableness, baffled all comment. She sat like a numbed being, but more than anything else in the world she prayed for Daniel Rocke.

"Everything is ready in the operating room," the woman announced calmly.

Her husband rose to his feet and glanced expectantly towards Ann. Suddenly they heard the sound of hasty footsteps in the hall. The door was opened and closed. Leopold Greatson, a little out of breath, stood facing them. His patron frowned.

"Why have you come back?" he demanded.

"There's something up outside!" the young man cried. "As I passed the corner of Roehampton Lane, I met a police van coming up. I stopped and came back. There are seven of them. They've got the house surrounded. A man saw me and spoke to me—might have been a gentleman. 'Where's the girl you brought up here?' he asked. I told him I'd left her here. 'Fetch her back and take her away,' he ordered, 'and you'll do yourself a bit of good.' That isn't exactly what he said, but it's near to the sense of it.—Come on, young lady. I don't understand this hair-dealing business. We'll vamoose."

Ann rose eagerly to her feet. The man who had called himself "Doctor Warking" appeared curiously unperturbed.

"I wonder, Greatson, whether I dare entrust you with a considerable sum of money," he said, drawing a great bundle of notes from his pocket. "I have no

doubt that this is merely a friendly call, but——"

Some instinct prompted Ann to call out, but she was too late. Greatson had taken an impetuous step forward, his right hand outstretched. The other seized it in a grip cruel as the bite of a vice, swung him round with amazing strength and brought him crashing to the floor. Breathlessly, Ann looked upon a feat which she would never have believed possible—she saw Greatson lifted on to the other man's back and carried from the room. Then, before she had realised her danger, her own time came. The woman, who had moved to her side, suddenly held her with a strangling clasp.

"Keep quiet," she ordered, in the tone of a nurse soothing her patient. "Just sniff this—that's right. Now keep still."

The minutes which passed seemed for ever afterwards to be one of Ann's most hideous memories. She found herself in those first moments of realisation, lying back in an easy-chair, conscious, yet with a strange sense of powerlessness. She tried to move, and fell down. Her arms, her legs, even the muscles of her neck when she tried to turn her head, seemed atrophied. She heard stealthy footsteps around the house. She even heard the front door open and close. She tried to remember the brief space of time immediately following the moment when that long, thin arm had clasped her neck—and tried in vain. She was all the time conscious of some unfamiliarity with regard to herself, something she failed to realise but which gave her a strange feeling of imperfect identity. The seconds ticked on. Then at last came a steady

hammering at the front door, a sound which went echoing through the house. There was no reply. The hammering was repeated. Then there was the sound of the door being burst open, footsteps in the bare, stone-flagged hall, the eager entrance of some one into the room. Daniel Rocke stood there, a revolver in his hand.

"Here's the woman!" he called out. "Keep your line across the hall."

Ann tried to speak. Her lips were feeble, the sound almost inarticulate. She moved her head slightly, however, and Daniel gave a great cry.

"They've done us!" he shouted, springing backwards. "After the taxi, Thomas! Never mind the house. After the taxi!"

Ann was still bewildered. Then, looking down at herself, she suddenly realised what that sense of imperfect identity meant. Vague, half-stifled recollections, lingering in the back of her mind as though they belonged to some former life, suddenly became insistent. She was wearing a nurse's uniform. She remembered the slipping of her own gown on to the floor.

Colonel Sir Francis Worton was a little depressed about the whole affair—also a little bored. He had enjoyed the three days' holiday in which he had afterwards indulged, immensely, and on his return he would have preferred to have talked golf.

"The affair, my dear Daniel," he said, "can only be termed unfortunate. I admit that you were perhaps bound to call in Scotland Yard, but you might at least

have insisted upon a more skilful organiser for your little venture. There you were, a dozen presumably intelligent men, entirely fooled by a couple of lunatics."

"On paper I know it sounds ridiculous," Daniel admitted. "On the other hand, you must remember that a lunatic of the Londe type, who suffers from one obsession at a time and is sane on every other point, is the most difficult person in the world to get hold of. He's as strong as a lion too. He carried that young man upstairs before he changed clothes with him."

"Personally," Q 20 remarked, "I think that Miss Lancaster is one of the luckiest persons I know. With all due deference to you, Daniel, she should never have been allowed to run such a risk."

"You can't use the word 'allow' when you talk about Miss Lancaster," Daniel replied irritably. "She does what she wants to, and that's all there is about it. That part of the affair was entirely her own planning. I could not have kept her from going to Elton Lodge unless I had held her back by force."

"The whole affair is very unfortunate," his companion repeated. "The young man, Leopold Greatson, was most interesting to us. Through him, I am quite sure that in a week or two we should have found out where these three lost Russians were hiding. Scotland Yard has really got nothing against him worth bringing him into court for. He'll get six or eight months at the worst, and when he comes out he will have lost touch with the present situation. Upon my word, though she's a good-looking girl, I'm almost sorry I put you on your guard."

"Don't talk rubbish!" Daniel rejoined, testily. "She might have met with a horrible death."

"You think that Londe was really in earnest, then?"

"He was in earnest about the two men he murdered to get at their brains," Daniel reminded his chief. "There was the operating table all ready in the bath-room, too, the proper knives laid out, and two or three surgical books dealing with the scalp."

Q 20 shivered a little and threw away his cigarette.

"You may have lost Greatson," Daniel continued, "but your tip to me probably prevented another hideous murder."

"Right, Daniel, as usual," his friend admitted. "I regret nothing. Only—next time you get on the track of that man Londe, let me take a hand."

There was a glitter in Daniel's eye which was almost bloodthirsty. This was in the days when he was full of self-confidence.

"The next time," he declared, "will be the last!"

III

THE HOUSE ON SALISBURY PLAIN

A MAN brought his Ford motor car to a standstill before a signpost on the dreariest part of Salisbury Plain at about nine o'clock on a wild, blustery night. The wind came booming like an incessant cannonade across the vast, empty spaces. The man—Richard Bryan was his name—was cold, tired and depressed. He was a commercial traveller from Exeter, engaged in the sale of the cheaper articles of ladies' attire to the drapers' shops in the smaller villages. He had passed a wearisome day without taking a single order, and he was anxious now to reach a village still four or five miles off, where he could spend the night. He had pulled up abruptly on seeing the signpost, and perplexity was written in his face. According to his recollection, it was a straight run to Bruntingford, his destination. To his surprise, the signpost pointed to a road on his left—a broad road, hedgeless and ditchless like all the others. There was no doubt whatever that the signpost read:

BRUNTINGFORD 7 MILES

—and signposts cannot lie. Bryan stepped back into his car, reversed for a few yards, and took the indicated route.

There is very little difference in the roads which traverse Salisbury Plain, but this man, from the first was not happy. From the roar of the wind in his face he knew that he was travelling northwards, when he should have been travelling due east. There was a clump of trees which he thought he remembered, which was certainly not in evidence. The road, too, was becoming narrower. Consequently, when he saw lights shining from the windows of a tall, shadowy house on his left, he jammed on his brakes and brought the car to a standstill. The house, which was approached by a rough track only, seemed to be standing in the middle of a field, and was about a hundred yards back from the road. As he made his way towards it, he became convinced that, as far as that signpost was concerned, he must have been under some hallucination. There was no such house as this on the road to Bruntingford.

It was an ancient building, with many rows of empty windows, but there was a light burning from somewhere on the ground floor, and his summons was promptly answered. It struck him, as he stood there in the darkness, listening to the approaching footsteps, that the silence of the place was almost extraordinary. The barking of a dog would have been a relief. The house seemed set in a cavern of silence. There was nothing to be heard but the booming of the wind, and even that seemed more like a background than an actual sound.

The door was opened in due course, and a powerful man, well dressed in country tweeds, looked out. He

seemed somewhat surprised to see his visitor, but his tone was courteous.

"What can I do for you?" he enquired.

"Sorry to trouble you, sir," Bryan replied, "but I have rather lost my way. The signpost seemed to say that this was right for Bruntingford, but I feel sure that I am on the wrong road."

"Come inside, please," the other begged. "I am afraid that the wind will blow out my lamp."

Richard Bryan obeyed, and the door was immediately closed. The hall was in darkness, but light came flooding out from a room on the left-hand side. The tenant of the house pointed courteously towards it.

"Step in for one moment," he invited. "You are on the wrong road for Bruntingford. I can easily put you right, though. I have a map in my study."

Richard Bryan was a stolid, unimaginative young man who had served behind the counter of a small draper's shop during his earlier life, spent two years at a London warehouse, and was now only a moderately successful traveller. His was a life lived in small ways amongst small people. He had scarcely ever read a book of fiction since he had left school. *Tit-Bits, Answers,* and *The News of the World,* were his literary diversions. Yet, as he stood there, he had a queer feeling of insecurity, a nervous dread of penetrating further into this partially occupied house.

"Much obliged, sir," he said; "but there's no need for me to keep you. I didn't think this was the right road, somehow. I'll just step back to the cross-road."

"I'll show you your exact route on my map," the

older man replied, throwing open the door. "Come in and warm your hands for a moment."

The traveller had not the courage to yield to the one nervous instinct of his life. He crossed the threshold of the room—a very large and lofty apartment, bare enough at one end, but with couches, easy-chairs, a multitude of books, and a great log fire, at the other. Lying on the hearthrug before it, half-risen now at his entrance, was a woman who, even in that light, seemed to him more than ordinarily beautiful—a woman dressed in a dull green tea gown, who looked at him with strange eyes.

"Gentleman lost his way motoring, my dear," his companion explained cheerfully. "Sit down for a moment, sir, whilst I get my map. I can show you in a minute where you went wrong. Will you have a whisky and soda?"

This was an invitation which Richard Bryan seldom refused, and which he had never felt less inclined to refuse than at the present moment. He sat on the edge of his chair and watched the tenant of the house mix his drink at the sideboard. His occupation was one which was supposed to develop the gift of conversation. He found it impossible, however, to think of anything to say to the woman who, risen now to a sitting posture, was clasping her knees with her hands.

"Is it very cold, driving?" she asked softly.

"Bitterly, ma'am," he answered. "I've crossed the Plain a good many times in the way of business, and when this north wind blows it fairly goes through you."

"Come nearer to the fire," she invited. "If you

have crossed the Plain so often, how is it that you have lost your way?"

"That's what I can't quite figure out myself," he acknowledged. "I was going on all right until I got to the crossroads close here and saw the sign pointing down this road for Bruntingford. I couldn't understand it, for I could have sworn the way was straight on. However, I came down here, and everything looked so unfamiliar that I stopped at the first house I could find to know what was wrong. Here's good health, ma'am and sir," he added, raising the glass which had just been brought to him, to his lips.

"Good health to you, sir," was the courteous rejoinder. "You need not be afraid of my whisky. It is not pre-war, but it is good."

The traveller drank and set his glass down empty. All the time he fancied that he could see the woman's eyes glowing as she watched him, and he was conscious of a queer sensation of excitement. Surely the whisky must have been very strong! It was absurd, but the strength seemed to be going from his legs. He tried to speak and found it difficult. The other man had opened a cupboard and returned with a small smelling bottle. He took out the stopper carefully, and held it for a moment to Richard Bryan's nostrils. The latter sat there with staring eyes, mumbling senseless words.

"A very ordinary type," the woman murmured.

"Naturally, my dear," the man agreed. "A traveller, no doubt, peddling between the smaller villages."

"You had better go and see to things," she

enjoined. "I will stay here and watch him. It amuses me when he tries to talk."

He nodded assent and left the room with scarcely another glance at Mr. Richard Bryan. He put on an overcoat, and made his way out through the windy darkness to where the car was standing. With the air of an expert, he mounted to the driver's seat and drove her on the reverse until there was room to turn. Then he made his way back to the main road, turned a little to the left, and drove a short distance along to a rise in the road, which left the pasture four or five yards below. He drove the car to within an inch of the bank, descended, turned the wheel slightly, and pushed. The car started readily enough down the bank, and, meeting with many obstructions, turned over and over, and lay at the bottom, upside down, halfway across a small stream. He retraced his steps, pausing at the signpost to swing it back to its proper position, tramped the ground down with his feet where its foundations had been disturbed, and returned to his house. Richard Bryan was still seated in his chair, swaying a little and muttering to himself. The woman was watching him and laughing.

"He's trying to sell me blouses!" she exclaimed. "You really ought to make a fortune out of that drug of yours, Joseph. The man is quite sensible in his way, but every now and then he believes he is somewhere else."

"Very interesting," was the smiling reply. "We will leave him where he is for a quarter of an hour, whilst I finish my chapter. He will not disturb us."

It was a quaint trio grouped around the fireplace.

The woman was watching the drugged man, a smile of amusement playing about her lips at his struggles to return to sanity. Londe, in an easy-chair, with his feet upon the high fender, was reading with eager attention a chapter in the latest book of medical science. Bryan, numbed in body and brain, with flashes, every now and then, of realisation, unable to form coherent words, but none the less oppressed with fear, gibbered. Sometimes the end of a log fell off on to the hearth.

Ann, seated alone in her little outside office, was buried in a newspaper. Daniel, coming in after two hours spent at the British Museum, found her there, and paused on his way to his own sanctum.

"Fashions?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Murder," she answered.

Daniel frowned.

"If you want sensationalism," he suggested, "I should try Gaboriau or Sue. There is a crudeness about these modern crimes which makes them a most monotonous study."

"Have you read what they call the Salisbury Plain mystery?"

"I haven't seen a paper for a week. I am so afraid that I should have to make up my mind on the Irish question."

"You neglect a great deal when you leave the newspapers so severely alone," Ann told him. "In your profession——"

"Don't be silly," Daniel interrupted. "My profession is a reader of code manuscripts."

"It seems to me," she observed, "that you have a nervous fear of being called a detective."

"Well, I'm not a detective," he answered irritably. "I am affiliated with that branch of the Criminal Investigation Department which goes by the name of Q 20, and that's a different thing altogether. As a matter of fact, I have done nothing but decode manuscripts for a month."

"And found it pretty dull," she remarked coolly. "I can always tell when you're bored."

"I'm not bored," he retorted. "It's my liver."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Would you like to know about the Salisbury Plain mystery?" she asked.

"If you can tell it me in a few words," he answered. "I'm not going to read the newspaper accounts."

"The Salisbury Plain mystery is briefly this," she recounted. "Richard Bryan, a commonplace, unadventurous, commercial traveller, left Wincanton at about three o'clock one afternoon last week, for Bruntingford, where he meant to stay the night. He had with him samples of drapery and he drove a Ford motor car. The next morning, his car was found overturned by the side of the road in one of the loneliest parts of the district, and he himself was found close to it, almost unrecognisable and quite dead."

"Why unrecognisable?" Daniel enquired.

"Because of terrible injuries to the back of his head," she explained. "Every account affirms that the injuries were far more terrible than could have been caused by any accident. Further than that, the roads were dry, there was no sign of any skid; the night,

though windy, was not dark; the lamps of the car were in order, and the man was a highly capable driver."

"Any money about?"

"All the money he had with him, and some cheques in his possession, were found in his pocketbook."

"Luggage? Samples?"

"Untouched—lying with the wreck of the car."

"Anything in the man's private life to suggest an enemy?"

"Not a chance of it," she answered. "He was a dull little man, living a dull little life. His only ambition seems to have been to some day own a shop of his own."

"It sounds queer," Daniel admitted.

"It is queer," she agreed.

"It's a police job, anyway," Daniel concluded, passing on into his sanctum. "You can show Professor Mayer into my room when he arrives. I've done some good work for him to-day."

"Very good, Mr. Rocke."

Daniel passed on into his private office, lit a pipe, and studied a cipher which had been sent in from his old department. Miss Lancaster resumed her study of the Salisbury Plain mystery.

The young man got off his bicycle and stared at the signpost.

"BRUNTINGFORD 7 MILES," he read. "Well, I'm damned!"

He drew a map from his pocket and sat considering it. When he had folded it up, he was still in doubt. It had been raining off and on, but the sun was shining

now and the air moist and hot. He took out a handkerchief, which had seen much service, and wiped his forehead. He eased the knapsack on his shoulders and mounted his bicycle again. He took the road which, according to the signpost, led to Bruntingford.

"I'll stop at the first farmhouse I come to and see if they'll give me some tea," he decided. "I shall know for certain where I am then."

The first house he came to gave him to think. It stood some distance back from the road and was very much larger than the ordinary farmhouse. It had once, without doubt, been a mansion of repute, but it had apparently fallen now upon evil days. Three quarters of the place seemed to be shut up. The young man, whose name was Harry Dawson, was not of the genus who are afraid of snubs, so he wheeled his bicycle up to the front door and rang the bell. His hopes were a little dashed, however, when he found himself confronted, a few seconds later, by an exceedingly well-dressed and very beautiful woman, not at all a likely dispenser of cheap hospitalities.

"Beg your pardon, I'm sure," Dawson declared. "I was looking for a farmhouse where I could get a cup of tea."

"Pray come in," the lady invited, smiling. "I will give you one, with pleasure."

The young man hesitated. He was a Cockney and he was nearing the end of his holiday.

"I was thinking of something about ninepence," he explained, "with plenty of bread and butter."

"That will be quite all right," the lady promised him.

He leaned his bicycle against the outside wall and followed her into the house. She led him into a large, partially furnished room. A man, apparently of her own station in life, who was writing at a table, looked up enquiringly.

"This young gentleman," she announced, "wants some tea, with plenty of bread and butter.—You can sit down here," she told him, "while I go and get it for you."

"Look here," Harry Dawson queried, twirling his cap in his hand, "something a bit wrong here, ain't there? Making fun of me, eh? This isn't a farm-house or an inn."

"Never mind," the lady answered, with a smile, "you shall have your tea."

He looked at her in silent admiration. She had the most amazing eyes he had ever seen, and the most beautiful deep golden hair. He watched her for a moment, then unslung his knapsack and hung it over the back of a chair.

"Well, I'm not going to kick," he declared. "It's your look-out anyway. Ninepence is all I can run to, for I've another night's bed and supper to pay for. I thought I'd have been up in London to-night, but the weather was bad in Devonshire and the roads were horrid."

The woman had left the room, presumably to get the tea. The man rose to his feet, insisted upon his visitor taking an easy-chair, and seated himself opposite.

"Are you on a bicycling tour?" he asked.

"You've got it in one, guv'nor," was the prompt

response. "I've had a fortnight's holiday, and this is my last day but one. Name of Harry Dawson. I've a berth with Townem and Gillard, wholesale drapers in St. Paul's churchyard."

"I trust," his temporary host remarked, "that you have enjoyed your tour?"

"Pretty fair," Mr. Harry Dawson acknowledged. "A cycling tour ain't what it used to be, though. These cars have come along, and the prices of everything's gone up on the road. It will have to be the roadside for yours truly to-night, unless I can find a cheaper pub."

"How much farther did you think of going before you put up for the night?" the other enquired.

"Another ten or a dozen miles," was the unenthusiastic reply. "Place called Bruntingford, a bit further on, I thought I might get to."

The tea was a wonderful success, and after the tea came a whisky and soda. The visitor rose to leave with the utmost reluctance.

"I'll have to toddle on a bit," he announced. "It's almost dark now. What's the damage?"

The woman with the wonderful eyes laughed at him.

"My dear young man," she remonstrated, "we don't want any money. We've plenty of our own. It's lonely here and we're glad to see any one."

"If you put it that way, ma'am," Mr. Harry Dawson acquiesced promptly, "it suits me down to the ground."

"Why not stay with us for the night?" she suggested. "We'll give you some dinner and a bed and

charge you nothing. You can start at what time you like in the morning."

"Is this on the square?" the young man asked.

"Absolutely," she laughed. "I've a good cook, and I promise that you shall enjoy your dinner."

The invited guest unslung his knapsack.

"I'll promise you that myself," he declared. "This is the biggest stroke of luck I've had, these holidays."

The statement was, in view of later events, a little rash, but, nevertheless, Mr. Harry Dawson fared well that night. He ate food which was strange to him, ate it with appetite and in prodigious quantities. He drank wines which had been only a dream. He smoked cigars, roasted himself in front of the fire, and told them the story of his life several times over. When he went to bed after a final whisky and soda, he was most certainly unsteady on his feet. He slept at first deeply. Afterwards, he must have had a nightmare. He fancied that he awoke to find himself being carried by the dark, strong-looking man who had been his host, across the landing into another room—a bathroom, apparently. He was stretched upon a long trestle, and, before he knew what was happening, he was being tied to it. Even for a nightmare this was too much. He began to scream. Then he felt something pushed into his mouth, and the screams were choked. His host was standing over him in a long white coat. He held something in his hand which he had taken from a case—a short knife. The lamplight flashed upon its blue blade.

"You need not be alarmed," his host assured him

courteously. "You have something which I need and which is of little use to you. Better close your eyes for a moment."

It was a very horrible nightmare.

Ann was standing by the side of her employer's desk. The fingers which clutched the newspaper which she laid down before him, were trembling a little.

"Is this still only a police job?" she asked.

Daniel adjusted his tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles and read. The paragraph was headed:

ANOTHER TRAGEDY ON SALISBURY PLAIN.

SECOND UNDISCOVERED MURDER WITHIN A MONTH.

It went on to describe the finding of the body of a Mr. Harry Dawson, the youth whose disappearance had been recorded a few days ago, partially dressed, and with terrible injuries to the head, recalling in a most amazing manner the condition of the man Bryan whose corpse had previously been discovered within a few hundred yards of the same spot. The body was found under a clump of bushes, some distance from the road, in one of the loneliest parts of the Plain, visited only occasionally by shepherds or cattle tenders. It might have remained there, indeed, for months, the paragraph went on to say, but for the intelligence of a sheep dog which, by prolonged howling, brought his master from a quarter of a mile away to the spot.—

Daniel took off his spectacles and reached for the telephone.

"This must be investigated from our point of view at once," he admitted. "Please step out to the bookshop next door, Miss Lancaster, and buy me a map of Wiltshire. I will telephone for the car."

"Shall you communicate with Scotland Yard?" she asked.

He considered the point for a moment.

"I think not," he decided—"not just at present. They would probably take a purely official view of the matter, and would not approve of any independent investigations. I shall just look round myself first."

"We," Ann murmured.

Daniel frowned.

"Salisbury Plain is a very lonely place," he objected, "and the man we are in search of is dangerous. I think it would be better for you to wait here."

"That is a pity," she remarked, "because I am coming with you."

He frowned again.

"I am starting in half an hour," he warned her.

"I shall be ready in less than half that time," she rejoined.

He drew the telephone nearer to him.

"Go and get the map, then," he directed. "I am ordering the car round at once."

They lunched at Amesbury, and, after a further inspection of the map, Daniel decided to make it their headquarters. There were a few travelling Americans and English tourists in the room, and a sprinkling of archæologists, of all of whom Daniel took note with

interest. After lunch, he went himself to fetch his car from the garage, and spent a few minutes in the yard of the hotel and in the smoking room. When they started on their afternoon's expedition, he was a little preoccupied. Ann asked no questions. She sat quite still, looking ahead. He pointed out Stonehenge to her, and the two big military camps.

"The local impression," he confided, "is that one or more of the soldiers from that further camp are responsible. They have the reputation in the neighbourhood of being rather a rough lot."

"That is, of course, possible," Ann admitted.

They drove on for a considerable distance. It was an afternoon in late May, and the lassitude of springtime lay upon the far-spreading country. There were lambs in the fields, flowers dotted here and there in that endless green carpet, a tender green in the occasional groves of trees, a blue sky and a gentle, windless air. An almost pastoral calm brooded over the rolling Downs. The atmosphere of tragedy was entirely absent. Nevertheless, Ann was conscious of a tremor when her companion brought the car to a standstill behind two others already drawn up by the side of the road, and pointed to a little group of three or four people about a mile away.

"That, I suppose," he said, "is where the young man's body was found."

She looked steadfastly across in the direction to which he pointed.

"What are they doing there?" she enquired.

"Morbid curiosity, I should imagine," he answered. "The police have had their turn. I suppose the gen-

eral public are allowed to divert themselves now."

He thrust his hand into the pocket of his motoring coat, drew out a pair of field glasses and scrutinised the little group for a moment. Then he replaced them in his pocket and drove slowly off. About a mile further on, he halted at some crossroads.

"That is the ditch," he pointed out, "where Richard Bryan, the commercial traveller, and his overturned car were found."

"How do you know these things?" she asked curiously.

"I made enquiries at Amesbury," he told her. "It was very simple to recognise the spot—just short of these crossroads."

He descended from the car and strolled on towards the signpost. He examined this for a few moments carefully. The turf around it was disturbed, and the signpost itself had evidently been blown down and replaced.

"If any one desired," he remarked, "to have a practical joke with travellers, it would be quite easy. See!"

He swung the post round. The way to Bruntingford now—the village through which they had recently passed—was apparently down the lonely track which seemed to lead into the heart of the Plain and nowhere else.

"Quite simple, you see," he went on. "Below, in the dip there, is a house. Any man who was not quite sure of his way would naturally call to enquire there. That, I should imagine, is what Mr. Richard Bryan did, and, also, probably, this Mr. Harry Dawson. Un-

less I am very much mistaken, that house is tenanted by——"

"By whom?" Ann cried.

"By Sir Joseph and Lady Londe!"

She stared down towards the spot where the road suddenly fell out of sight.

"Are we going there now?" she asked.

"Not I!" was the gruff reply. "I've had a taste of that lunatic's methods."

"Then what are we going to do?"

Daniel led the way back to the car.

"Drive round a little and think things over," he answered. "There's plenty of time."

"Don't leave it too long," Ann advised, anxiously.

"We'll do something to-morrow," he assured her quietly.

During their drive, however, Daniel changed his mind. He called at a local police station of importance and asked to see the Chief. He was received by a tall, stiff-looking personage, with a fair moustache and an exceedingly self-assured manner.

"What can I do for you, Mr.—er—Rocke?" he asked, glancing at the card.

"Do you remember the outrages at Dredley?" Daniel enquired quickly. "The criminal was supposed to be a famous Australian surgeon—Sir Joseph Londe."

"Quite well," the Inspector acknowledged. "The police down in Surrey weren't very smart."

"You have a chance of atoning for them," Daniel observed. "Sir Joseph Londe and his wife are living at Homans Hall, about fourteen miles away, close to

the scene of these two murders. He is probably responsible for them."

The Inspector smiled.

"We have already solved the mystery of those murders, Mr. Rocke," he announced. "I can put my hand on two of the men to-morrow. I am waiting to try and get the third."

"Indeed?" Daniel murmured.

"Soldiers from the barracks," the Inspector went on. "I knew that from the first. Fitting things together wasn't quite so easy, but we shall be taking the men to Salisbury within the next few days."

"Dear me!" Daniel exclaimed, under his breath.

"As regards the occupants of Homans Hall," the Inspector continued, twirling his moustache, "you are mistaken in this matter also. Their name is Charlton, they come from Tunbridge Wells, the man is an antiquarian and a scholar, and I happen to know that the lady was in Amesbury, looking for servants, and shopping, only yesterday. You'll excuse my suggesting, sir, that you should be a little careful before making such statements."

"I do not make them without conviction," Daniel replied. "I was in the Foreign Office for some years, I have been a King's Messenger, I have served in the Secret Service and in the Intelligence Department, and I am now attached to the new department which you may have heard of—Q 20."

The Inspector was unperturbed and unimpressed.

"Quite so," he murmured. "All the same, you have got hold of a mare's nest this time, Mr. Rocke. You have been chiefly concerned, no doubt, with

foreign matters. I think you'll find the police in this country are quite able to run their own affairs. There are no crimes left undetected for very long in this neighbourhood, and we haven't any particular fancy for the interference of amateurs.'

Daniel picked up his hat.

"Very well," he said, "you're making a great mistake, and you're throwing away the chance of earning a handsome reward."

The Inspector's smile was maddening.

"I'll risk that, sir," he declared.

There was a fair sprinkling of diners that night in the pleasant little coffee room of the hotel. The head waiter, who was in a gossipy frame of mind, paid a good deal of attention to Daniel.

"We get an interesting crowd here sometimes, sir," he confided. "The gentleman in the corner, with spectacles, is an Oxford professor with his wife. The three ladies are Americans, all spinsters, who are, I believe, going round the world. The two young ladies, sir, are artists."

"And the gentleman in the other corner?" Daniel enquired.

"Professor Philip H. Thomson, sir," the man replied. "He is from Harvard University. Coffee in the lounge, sir?"

"If you please."

Daniel sipped his coffee, lit a cigarette, glanced through the evening paper, exchanged a few remarks with Ann, and, with a whispered excuse to her, made his way towards where the Harvard professor was

seated. The latter was a tall, spare man with jet-black hair, and he wore rimless spectacles.

"How do you do, Professor Thomson?" Daniel said.

"How are you, Mr. Rocke?" was the quiet but cordial reply. "My name, as I imagine you know, is Windergate."

Daniel dropped into a chair by his side.

"You're not interfering with the local police, I hope?" he remarked.

Mr. Windergate smiled.

"They're going to arrest some soldiers," he confided.

"A very natural error. You understand, Mr. Windergate, that my interest in this is personal, not official—personal because the man who murdered these two fellows pretty nearly had me."

"The Australian surgeon?" Windergate asked like a flash.

Daniel nodded.

"He is living alone with his wife in a lonely house close to the scene of the murders. Have you authority enough to take him?"

"I should say so!" Windergate replied. "Now tell me all about it! I've had my eye on that part of the country."

"Do you mind my secretary joining up?" Daniel enquired. "To tell you the truth, her father was one of Londe's victims, and it was she who first spotted this thing. If there's any question of the reward, for instance, I'm not a claimant myself, but I should like her to be considered."

"The reward will be yours or hers, as you arrange," the detective assented, rising to his feet. "I'm only thankful to be let in at the death, instead of having these country boobs do the shouting."

Mr. Windergate was introduced to Ann and carried the little company off to his sitting room, where he drank in every word of Daniel's story with prompt credulity.

"We'll have him to-morrow morning," the pseudo-Professor Thomson declared. "We'll have him in Salisbury Gaol while these bumpkins keep their eyes on the soldiers."

Ann looked grave.

"I don't know whether Mr. Rocke has told you," she said, "that this man Londe is enormously strong."

The detective smiled.

"Two armed men," he observed, "are a match for one at any time. I expect Mr. Rocke has been in a scrap or two before."

"I think you ought to make a certainty of the matter," Ann persisted. "Londe will show fight. Why run the risk? Besides, he's so clever. Think how he escaped from Elton Lodge!"

Mr. Windergate stretched out his arm—his muscles were like iron.

"I was heavy-weight champion of the Police Force up to last year," he said, "and I learnt to draw my gun on the Mexican border. Londe is far more likely to escape from a crowd than from us two. I don't know how long you've known Mr. Rocke, Miss Lancaster, but I remember hearing of a scrap he had on the Cologne train, when he was doing King's Mes-

senger work, which rather impressed me. You leave it to us."

"I'm inclined to think myself," Daniel put in, "that the intervention of the local police might be unfortunate."

"I suppose you know best," Ann acquiesced, a little doubtfully. "When do you propose to go?"

The detective glanced at his watch.

"We dined early," he said. "It's only twenty past eight now. I propose that we don't wait until to-morrow morning—that we start right away. You'd better take your two-seater, Mr. Rocke, and I'll take mine."

"You're not going to leave me at home?" Ann expostulated.

"If Miss Lancaster will promise to remain outside," Windergate suggested, "there is no reason why she should not accompany us."

Ann rose to her feet.

"I shall be ready in five minutes," she agreed.

It was about a quarter past nine when they dropped down the hill, at the foot of which Homans Hall reared its inhospitable front towards the road. It was still light, and an edge of the moon was showing. As the two cars drew to a standstill, Windergate pointed with a little gesture of satisfaction to the chimneys, from which smoke was issuing.

"The house is still inhabited, at any rate," he remarked. "Come along, Mr. Rocke."

Daniel sprang to the ground, touched his starting lever to be sure that it was out of gear, pushed the

brake on another notch, and nodded to Ann. She was looking a little distressed.

"You're sure you have your revolver?" she asked.

He nodded.

"And some spare cartridges in the other pocket."

"Well, good luck to you!" she said bravely.

The two men walked up to the front door and rang the bell. Both adopted expedients which they deemed suitable to the occasion. They stood one on either side of the broad entrance, flat against the wall. In his right hand each clasped his revolver. In a few moments they saw the flickering light of a lamp being carried down the hall. The door was opened. The woman with the strange eyes stood there, peering out. She was wearing a tea gown of dull-coloured silk, and the light of the lamp flashed upon her beautiful hair. She looked a little vaguely at the two men.

"Can we see your husband?" Daniel asked.

If she recognised him, she made no sign.

"Certainly," she replied. "Won't you come in? Have you lost your way?"

"Not exactly."

She led them across the hall to the study, and pushed open the door.

"My husband is here," she announced. "Joseph, here are two gentlemen who wish to speak to you."

Londe looked up and rose to his feet.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, with perfect composure. "An old friend, I believe? This is a lonely spot in which you have found me out."

He motioned towards chairs, but they both re-

mained standing. Londe still showed not the slightest signs of uneasiness.

"I believe I am right?" he went on pleasantly. "It is Mr. Daniel Rocke, is it not? We were on the point of trying a little experiment together once when your —er—nerve failed you."

"You were on the point of murdering me, Sir Joseph Londe," Daniel rejoined sternly.

The man frowned. The woman looked up from the chair into which she had sunk, and shook her head with a gesture of dissent.

"I wish you would not use that absurd word," Londe declared irritably. "There was no question of murder at all. I have been for years trying to find a very small portion of a human brain, to take the place of a damaged portion of my own. It is an exceedingly simple matter, the exchange, but I am most unfortunate. Nearly every brain I have come across is discoloured. I have arrived at the conclusion that the whole human race is suffering from some mysterious affliction."

"Sir Joseph Londe," Daniel said, "we can discuss those matters later. The object of my present visit is to ask you officially, if you please—this gentleman with me is Mr. Windergate of Scotland Yard—whether you know anything of the disappearance of Richard Bryan and Harry Dawson, and the subsequent murder of both of them? You need not say anything which you think will incriminate yourself, but——"

"Stop! stop!" Londe interrupted. "I beg that you will not continue to annoy me by the use of that

ridiculous word. The two young men you mention were both disappointments. I performed the operation myself upstairs here, but in each case the result was grievous. If your friend—Mr. Windergate, I think you said his name was—is interested in surgery——"

"Sir Joseph Londe," Windergate interposed, "we do not wish to hear anything more, if you please. You will have to come with me to Salisbury—you and your wife."

"What, to-night?"

"Now," Windergate insisted.

Londe rose to his feet.

"This visit is really most untimely, gentlemen," he complained. "I had a young man coming to see me to-morrow who would have made an excellent subject. Besides, there is no one in the house, and I have very many valuable manuscripts here."

"You will have to come with us to Salisbury, Sir Joseph," Windergate repeated. "I should be glad if you would make such preparations as you desire to make, at once."

Londe turned to his wife.

"You hear what these gentlemen say, my dear?" he asked querulously. "Of course, I can easily persuade any intelligent person that what I have done to restore the vacuum in my brain was absolutely justified. Still, it is a nuisance to have to make this journey."

The woman folded up her knitting and rose to her feet.

"This gentleman," she said, looking at Daniel, her eyes reproachful and her tone one of tender regret,

" has never been kind to us. However, we will go. It will be a little change."

They moved towards the door. Windergate preceded them, Daniel brought up the rear. They climbed the broad staircase. Sir Joseph threw open the door of a large bedroom.

" My wife and I are, unfortunately, without servants at the present moment," he explained. " You will see that this apartment is shared by both of us. It will be necessary to ask you gentlemen to withdraw while we make ready for the journey."

Windergate hesitated. The silence in the house seemed to indicate the truth of Londe's statements as to the absence of servants.

" I can assure you, gentlemen," the latter continued, " that there is no means of escape from this room, if we wished to escape, which we certainly do not. There is another door; but that only leads to the back stairs, and the exit from the back stairs is within sight of the hall. We will not be more than ten minutes."

" We will await you in the hall," Windergate decided.

" Is it an open car? " the woman asked.

" I am afraid that it is."

" I shall be three or four minutes longer, then," she remarked, with a little grimace. " I must really put on some warm things."

" I have a motoring outfit somewhere," Londe observed. " We will not keep you longer than we can help. You will find whisky and soda upon the sideboard."

The two men descended to the hall and seated them-

selves upon a bench which commanded both the back stairs and the front ones.

"He is absolutely mad," Windergate murmured. "Getting worse every day, I should say."

Daniel nodded.

"The trouble of it is," he pointed out, "that he is as sane as he can be upon every other subject. He saved hundreds of lives during the war—he and his wife between them. The work they did was prodigious. You know, of course, that they were both sent to an asylum afterwards and later discharged as cured."

"It is a very interesting case," Windergate admitted. "They'll never hang him. He's a lunatic, beyond a doubt."

In a quarter of an hour's time, the man and the woman descended the stairs. They were wrapped from head to foot in motoring coats. The woman wore a voluminous veil and the man a closely-fitting cap with ear flaps and celluloid spectacles. Windergate rose to his feet.

"You will excuse me, sir," he begged, "but I must search you for arms before we start."

Londe held up his hands with a little gesture of impatience. Windergate felt him all over. Then he nodded.

"Quite all right," he said. "This way."

They started for Salisbury in gloomy silence. In front was Daniel's car, with the woman by his side and Ann in the dickey. Behind came Windergate and the man, who had lit a cigar and was leaning back with folded arms, unperturbed and undismayed. The moon

had risen now, and the road was clearly visible, except where the shadows from the trees threw black gulfs across the way. They drove on through several villages, until before them they saw in the distance little pin-pricks of light and the vague outline of a city. Suddenly Ann leaned forward and touched Daniel on the arm.

"Will you stop a minute, please?" she begged.

They were on a straight piece of road, with open country on either side of them. Daniel thrust out his hand, slowed down and brought his car to a standstill. The other car followed suit.

"What's wrong?" Daniel demanded a little impatiently.

"The woman by your side," Ann declared, "is not Londe's wife."

Daniel started. The woman began to laugh. He tore off her veil. Then he sprang to the side of the other car. The man, relieved now by Windergate of his spectacles and cap, leaned back and laughed hoarsely.

"What's wrong, guv'nor?" he asked. "I thought we were to have a ride to Salisbury?"

Daniel had lost his temper. He thrust the cold muzzle of his revolver against the man's cheek.

"If you don't tell me the truth," he threatened, "I'll blow your head off!"

The man cowered back.

"Look here," he protested, "no violence. I've done nothing wrong—more has my wife."

"Your story, man—quick!" Daniel insisted.

"Well, my wife and I were both engaged at the

asylum near Bruntingford, where Sir Joseph and Lady Londe were patients some years ago," the man said. "Folks used to say there that I was rather like him; but that's neither here nor there. I heard tell of some people living at Homans Hall, who, one of the gardeners at Bruntingford insisted, had been in the asylum. So my wife and I, having a day off, went to see them last Thursday. The fact of the matter is, we'd got the sack, and I thought if these two really were Sir Joseph Londe and his missis, as seemed likely enough, from what the gardener told us, there might be something in it for us. We were hidden away in the kitchen part of the house and told to keep quiet. This morning we were both rigged out, I in some of his clothes, and Susan—my wife—in some of her ladyship's. To cut a long story short, they engaged us at ten pounds a day to lay tight in the room next to theirs and do exactly as we were told. An hour ago, we were told that we had to be taken into Salisbury, and keep up the bluff of being Londe and his missis as long as we could."

They left the man and woman there in the road, shouting and complaining. Daniel's was the faster car, and he and Ann raced up to the gate of Homans Hall some distance ahead of Windergate. There were no lights in the house, which stood there black and deserted. By the time Windergate arrived, he found Daniel, his revolver in one hand and an electric torch in the other, coming across the field.

"I've searched the house!" Daniel groaned. "They've gone, right enough! If they'd had to fight, they meant to do it from their bedroom. There's a

regular barricade there, and a whole case of cartridges."

Windergate pointed to the open doors of the cowshed.

"That's where they kept their car," he declared. "I've traced the wheels across the field."

They hurried to the gate. There were indications that the car had been driven to the left, along the deserted road which led past the house to the few scattered villages almost in the centre of the Plain. They prepared at once to follow.

"We could do with the local men now," Windergate remarked; "but we may have luck."

Daniel started away first. He was scarcely halfway up the dip, however, when his right tyre went off with a report like a pistol shot, and his two-seater skidded almost across the road. As he brought her to a standstill, he heard a similar sound from behind, twice repeated. He looked around in time to see the other car skid into the ditch, and Windergate himself thrown out, fortunately on to the grass. They searched the road, a moment or two later—Windergate, his clothes caked in fresh mud, and the blood streaming from a cut on his temple.

"The whole place is strewn with broken glass and nails," the latter muttered. "Next time I try to arrest a lunatic, I'll take a posse of police!"

Late on the following afternoon, Daniel and Ann drove slowly through the streets of Amesbury and drew up before the hotel. They had left Windergate at Salisbury. The inspector with the fair moustache,

who was standing upon the pavement, recognised Daniel and saluted him with a somewhat condescending smile.

"Any luck, sir?" he asked.

"Not exactly," Daniel replied. "How are you getting on?"

"I've got them as good as fixed, sir. You'll read all about it in a day or two. They've been trying for leave. Nothing doing! I've got the net over them all right."

Daniel smiled—the first time for a good many hours.

"You local fellows can give us all points," he admitted.

A boy ran across the road, bareheaded, from the police station.

"Chief Constable speaking from Salisbury, sir," he announced.

"When you've heard what he has to say, Inspector," Daniel remarked mildly, "you may feel inclined to come over and have a chat with me about those soldiers."

IV

THE SHAFTESBURY AVENUE MURDER

WINDERGATE, having paid an unsuccessful visit to the offices in Shaftesbury Avenue, showed a disposition to linger. Miss Ann Lancaster, who was not really busy, leaned back in her chair with her fingers resting idly upon the typewriter.

"I am sorry about Mr. Rocke," she said. "He is very uncertain these days."

"Busy?" her caller enquired.

"Some special work," Ann told him.

"Anything in my way?"

She shook her head.

"Some documents in cipher which one of our agents in Berlin came across and sent to the Foreign Office. Mr. Rocke goes down there every morning."

"What time do you close for lunch?" Windergate asked, glancing at his watch.

"About one, as a rule," was the careless reply. "We have no fixed hour."

Windergate coughed. He was a self-contained, self-possessed person, but he gave one the impression of being momentarily a little nervous.

"You wouldn't care to—I wonder whether you'd come and have lunch with me?" he invited.

Ann was taken by surprise. There had never been

anything about her companion's manner to suggest that feminine society was one of his distractions.

"It is very kind of you," she said, hesitatingly. "I don't bother about lunch much, as a rule."

"We'll make up for it to-day, then," Windergate declared, recovering his confidence. "We'll go to a little quiet place I know of, close here. Never any crowd there."

Ann closed down her desk, retired to a corner of the room and put on her hat.

"It's very nice of you," she repeated. "I am quite ready. You realise, don't you, that I am in my working clothes?"

Windergate glanced at her once or twice as they passed through the streets, and his previous impressions were all confirmed. She was dressed with the utmost simplicity; but she possessed to the full that air of nameless elegance which is the heritage of the chosen few of her sex. Her walk was graceful, her poise pleasant, but not exuberant. She took no trouble to conceal the fact that the little expedition was a pleasure to her.

"I love nice restaurants," she confided, as she unfolded her napkin and looked around her with interest. "I've only seen the outside of this one."

"Don't you ever go out to lunch with Mr. Rocke?" he asked her.

"Twice in my life," she replied, "and then it was when we were working together. As a matter of fact," she went on, "Mr. Rocke is very careless about lunch. If he is interested at all in his work, he just doesn't leave off."

"And then he grumbles at his digestion," Windergate observed.

She laughed.

"He has fits of being very sorry for himself," she declared, "and fits of forgetting that there's anything wrong with him, which, as a matter of fact, there isn't. His latest fad, though, is that it's quieter in the office between one and half-past two. It can't really make any difference, because we never hear anything of the people in the other part of the building."

Ann, like most healthy young women, accustomed though she was to the slightest of lunches, was perfectly well able to adapt herself to her host's view upon the subject. Windergate, away from his professional atmosphere, was a very pleasant, almost an amusing companion. She finished her coffee and cigarette with regret.

"Thank you for an excellent lunch," she said, as she drew on her gloves. "I expect Mr. Rocke will be back now, if you like to come round and see him."

"I think I will," Windergate acquiesced, "although I haven't anything very important to say."

"No news, I suppose?"

Her companion made a little grimace.

"No," he admitted. "I am afraid this is one of those cases where a lunatic has proved himself cleverer than two sane men. We shall have him some day, though."

"I hope so," Ann prayed, with sudden fervour.

"It was the cunning of the lunatic which helped him to evade us," Windergate observed, as they started on

their homeward walk. "It will be the inevitable persistence of the lunatic which will deliver him into our hands some day."

They reached the block of buildings in which Rocke's offices were situated. Ann looked at the board and found the key missing.

"He is here, then," she remarked, as she preceded her companion to the lift. "Has Mr. Rocke been in long?" she asked the girl in attendance.

"Can't say, miss," the latter replied. "I've only just come on duty."

They stepped out of the lift at its destination, and climbed the last flight of stairs. Ann opened the door of the outer office and, crossing the room, threw open the inner door.

"Mr. Windergate is here to see you, Mr. Rocke," she announced.

The figure seated at the desk made no movement.

"Mr. Windergate," Ann began again——

Then, with a little cry, she broke off in her sentence. Something in the limp, unnatural pose of the man seated in the revolving chair, suddenly terrified her. She sprang forward, but Windergate was quicker. He stood between her and the figure at the desk.

"Miss Lancaster," he said, "you had better go back to your office. Try and compose yourself. Ring up Scotland Yard for me, and ask for Harrison and Kimball to be sent round here at once."

"Has anything happened to him?" she asked, shivering in every limb.

"I am afraid that he is dead," Windergate answered

gravely. "There is a bullet wound through his temple. But——"

The connecting door leading to the outer office was suddenly opened. Rocke stepped in.

"What the devil's all this?" he demanded irritably.

Daniel, Sir Francis Worton—commonly known as Q 20, the head of the new Secret Service Department represented by those mystic letters—and Windergate, met, a fortnight later, at the former's office for an informal conference.

"The subject of my murder is naturally an interesting one to me," Daniel observed, as he swung round in his chair and offered cigarettes to the other two men. "Is it my fancy, Windergate, or are you moving a little more slowly in this matter than usual? You can't afford too many failures, you know."

"Departmental jealousy again!" Windergate declared lightly. "As a matter of fact, we have gone a little further than we have thought it wise to make public. I am now in a position to tell you the name of the man who was shot whilst sitting in your chair."

"Has any one identified him, then?" Daniel asked.

"Not voluntarily," was the thoughtful reply. "As you know, no papers at all were found upon the dead man, but a doll in a cardboard box was discovered in his pocket. We made enquiries amongst the London buyers of such articles, and discovered one firm who had just ordered a quantity from a German agent visiting London. The rest was quite simple. The man's name was Israel Kasters, and he had a single

room in a block of offices in the Tottenham Court Road."

"I can add a little to that information," Worton observed. "Kasters came over here in the wake of a well-known German financier, some months ago. He remained behind with the avowed intention of opening up some trade. My department has kept him shadowed since his arrival. There has been nothing to report. He seems, indeed, to have been an industrious, hard-working man. The only suspicious thing about him that came to our knowledge was that he was certainly in communication with people in Berlin whom we do not trust."

Daniel threw the remainder of his cigarette into the grate, and took a fresh one from the open box by his side. His manner had become graver, his tone was almost portentous.

"The first half of the mystery now solves itself," he said. "The visit of Israel Kasters to this office at a time when he must have believed it to be unoccupied, is explained. My work for the last fortnight at the Foreign Office has consisted in deciphering some secret correspondence which was seized by one of our agents in Berlin. Occasionally, I have brought some of the less important documents to work on here. Kasters evidently got to know of that, and came with the idea of purloining them. You will remember that a small jimmy was found upon him."

Worton nodded thoughtfully.

"You and I know the truth, Daniel," he pointed out, "so it is perhaps only fair to take Windergate into our confidence. These documents, which one

of my agents seized and handed over to the Foreign Office, comprise, amongst other things, a list of places where secret stocks of arms exist in Germany. A German agent over here would certainly think it worth while to go to any lengths to regain possession of them."

"I quite see that," Windergate agreed. "The presence of the murdered man in this office is now explained. That, however, only leads us to the baffling part of the whole thing. Why was Kasters, in the pursuit of his avocation as burglar-spy, murdered—and by whom?"

"The first thing one has to make up one's mind about," Worton remarked, "is whether he was shot as Israel Kasters or in mistake for Rocke. When the blinds are drawn here, the light is very bad, and any one entering from this door, and shooting from a few yards away, might easily have thought that the person seated at the desk was the natural occupant of the room. You yourselves admitted that you were deceived for the first few seconds."

"I think we may accept the fact," Windergate observed, "that a man coming here with the idea of murdering Mr. Rocke, might have shot the man at the desk, believing he was accomplishing his purpose. But have you any enemies likely to go to such extremes?"

Daniel shook his head.

"I can't imagine that I have," he admitted. "The only really dangerous person I can think of, who I know wouldn't hesitate to commit murder, is the man who slipped through our fingers at Salisbury Plain.

We're not on his track, though, so it seems an absurd thing to imagine that he should risk his life and liberty in this fashion. As a first-class lunatic, I think he would be far too cunning."

"My people have been watching a house in Hampstead in connection with that affair," Windergate intervened. "If we are on the right track, he might easily have imagined that you were concerned in it."

"The trouble of it is," Daniel reminded them all, "that whereas a dozen people saw Israel Kasters come in, not one of them seems to have seen anybody else whose presence cannot be accounted for. Whoever murdered Kasters couldn't have flown here, or come in through the window."

"That's true," Windergate agreed.

Ann knocked at the door and entered.

"There is a young person who wants to see you, Mr. Rocke," she announced.

"Indeed!" Daniel replied, with gentle sarcasm. "It might possibly have occurred to you that I am by way of being engaged."

Ann remained unruffled, though her tone grew a little colder.

"The young person, I think, has something to say on the subject which you are discussing. She seems rather excited."

"Show her in at once," Daniel directed.

The three men looked up curiously as the young woman was ushered in. She was good-looking in a somewhat bold fashion. She wore a very low-cut blouse and very short skirts.

"I wanted to speak to Mr. Rocke," she announced, a little embarrassed.

"I am Mr. Rocke," he told her. "What can I do for you? We understood that you had something to say about what happened in this office the week before last."

"I have something to say to you," the girl admitted, staring at him in somewhat puzzled fashion. "I have been expecting to hear from you for days."

"From me?" Daniel repeated. "But why?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I'll see you another time," she suggested. "You're busy now."

She turned away. Daniel held out his hand.

"Stop a minute," he begged. "I didn't recognise you at first. You're the lift girl, aren't you?"

"Not so much 'lift girl', if you please," she retorted, with a little toss of the head. "I and another young lady have run the lift here since the building was turned into offices. It's my afternoon out, so I thought I'd just pop up and have a word with you. Another time will do. See you to-morrow, perhaps."

"Look here," Daniel said, "I don't quite understand you. These gentlemen are quite as much interested in the affair as I am. One of them is from Scotland Yard, and we were talking it over as you came in. If you have anything to say, now is the time."

She looked at him in amazement.

"Are you bluffing?" she demanded.

"I certainly am not," Daniel replied. "What do you mean by 'bluffing'? If there's anything you

know about this affair, now is the time to tell it to us."

The girl swung round on her heel.

"Thank you," she concluded, "I'll choose my own time."

She pushed her way from the office. They heard the outer door close and her footsteps on the stairs. They all three looked at one another.

"That young woman knows something," Windergate remarked solemnly.

"The queer part of it is," Daniel observed, "that she appears to think I do too."

Windergate, on his way out into the street, found their recent visitor studying the nameboard. He raised his hat. The girl glanced at him with some interest, but without recognition.

"I saw you a few minutes ago in Mr. Rocke's office," Windergate reminded her.

"Oh, you were one of them three, were you?" she remarked. "Didn't recognise you."

"I wonder whether you would favour me with a few minutes' conversation?" he suggested.

"I'm not going to tell you anything—at least I don't think so," she replied.

"All the same, just a cup of tea over at that little place opposite," he urged. "I won't keep you long."

She looked at him doubtfully. Windergate was very presentable, she had nothing particular to do, and men were the one interest of her life.

"You won't make yourself a nuisance asking too many questions?" she demanded.

"I shall probably forget to ask any questions at all," he assured her tactfully.

The girl passed out into the street by his side.

"We won't go there," she said, indicating the tea shop to which he had pointed. "There's a much nicer one a few steps further down. It's a bit more expensive, but it's not so crowded. You get little tables to yourself, and pink-shaded lights. Quite stylish!"

"Wherever you say," Windergate agreed cheerfully. "You lead and I'll follow."

"Anywhere?" she asked, with an arch glance.

"Try me," he replied gallantly.

They entered the tea room of her choice and found a sufficiently retired table. Windergate was shrewd enough to avoid all reference to the subject on which he desired information, until the meal was nearing completion. He learned that his companion's name was Rose Paxton; that she earned thirty-eight shillings a week, which, after she had paid for her board and lodging, left her a very insufficient amount with which to attire herself in the manner she desired; that gentlemen were sometimes generous; that she liked her companion's tie, and his voice, and that she had a weakness for grey eyes; that she loved the pictures, but preferred the theatres when a suitable escort presented himself; that she was for the moment unattached, most of her beaux having failed to come up to the financial standard required. Confidence having been thoroughly established, he ventured, as though the matter had suddenly come into his mind, to ask her a question.

"What were you going to say to Mr. Rocke, if you

had found him alone this afternoon?" he enquired curiously.

The girl had been talking so much that she had lost the gift of reticence. She leaned forward in her chair.

"Are you a friend of Mr. Rocke?" she asked.

"Certainly."

"You're not out to do him any harm?"

"Quite the contrary," he assured her.

"Well, I came in to ask him," she explained, "why he hadn't kept a promise he made me some time ago."

"What promise did he make?"

"It was on a certain afternoon, not so very long ago," she continued mysteriously. "I took him down from the sixth floor alone, and he gave me the biggest tip I'd ever had—half a sovereign. 'Look here,' he said, just before he stepped out, 'I want you to forget that you ever brought me up, in case you should be asked. Wipe it out of your mind—you understand?' I asked him what the game was, but he didn't reply. 'You do as I ask,' he insisted, 'and there'll be a nice little sum for your banking account.' He said something about taking me to the theatre too; but just then we reached the ground floor and out he shot. In about five minutes, if you please, in he came again, just muttered 'Sixth floor', and got out, when he arrived there, without as much as a word or a 'Good afternoon.' That's how he's been all the time since, as stand-offish as you like. I made up my mind I'd go and have a talk with him at the first opportunity, and that's why I turned up there this afternoon."

"Did the day you are speaking of happen to be the

day on which a man was murdered in Mr. Rocke's office?"

"Yes."

He was thoughtful for a moment.

"Were you at the inquest?" he asked.

"No," she replied. "The other girl was. The day the thing happened was really my afternoon off. I was standing talking to Bessie—that's the other young lady—when a boy she wanted to speak to came down the stairs. A bell rang from the sixth floor, and I took the lift up so as to give her a moment with this chap."

"And you found Mr. Rocke waiting for you on the sixth floor?"

"Yes! Everything just as I've told you. What should you do about it?"

Windergate considered the matter for a moment.

"What you have told me is very important," he said.

"Why are you so interested?" she asked.

"Because I belong to the C.I.D. at Scotland Yard," he told her. "I am really in charge of this affair."

She looked at him for a moment, blankly disappointed.

"A 'tec!" she exclaimed. "I thought you were a gentleman!"

"I am man enough to enjoy talking to a pretty girl, anyhow," he declared, "and if you liked me well enough to let me make you a little present——"

"Oh, I like you all right," she interrupted; "but it isn't quite the same thing. I thought you'd brought me out to tea because you liked the look of me—

taken a fancy to me, or something of that sort. Seems now as though you'd been kidding all the time."

"I haven't," he assured her earnestly. "Look here, I'll take you to the theatre any time you like this week."

She smiled at him beatifically.

"You're a dear!" she exclaimed. "And as to what I've told you, it's the truth, after all, and he hasn't kept his word. What should you do about it?"

"I should wait until to-morrow," Windergate advised, "and then go and see him again."

"Righto!" the girl assented. "And what about Friday night for the theatre?"

"I'll get the seats," he promised. "We'll have dinner in the Trocadero Grill Room at seven o'clock."

"You haven't half an hour to spare for the pictures now, I suppose?" she asked wistfully, as they reached the street.

He glanced at his watch.

"Come along," he invited. "We'll go opposite. I can just manage an hour."

They crossed the street, the girl's fingers already feeling for his arm.

Daniel, in those days, was oppressed by vague but very singular apprehensions. He became suddenly convinced of the fact that he was being watched, that he walked all the time in some sort of danger. He had stronger locks put on to both his doors, and he went armed. He was not a nervous man; but the feeling was persistent and ineradicable. He walked down Shaftesbury Avenue as though he were passing through a jungle in an untrodden forest, with en-

emies on every side. The men and women who jostled him on the pavement all became objects of suspicion. He grew even more irritable and captious than was his wont. At his club he fancied that people were beginning to avoid him. Windergate, too, seemed to have lost all interest in tracing the murderer of Israel Kasters, and remained curiously aloof. Even Ann, resentful of his frequent fits of ill temper, became unapproachable. One morning he sent for her. He was feeling particularly depressed and bad-tempered.

"Miss Lancaster," he said, "I saw you dining at the Milan last night with Windergate."

"Did you?" she remarked quietly.

"What the mischief's the matter with Windergate and you, and all of them?" he burst out. "You seem to dry up into monosyllables whenever I come near, and Windergate avoids the place as though we had the plague. Tell me, is Windergate ass enough to think that I killed Israel Kasters?"

"Mr. Windergate does not talk to me about such matters," she answered.

"What the devil does he talk to you about, then? You see enough of him," Daniel exclaimed irritably.

She smiled.

"I think that Mr. Windergate admires me," she confessed.

He looked at her, frowning but intent.

"I suppose you are a good-looking girl," he admitted, as though the idea had occurred to him for the first time.

"Mr. Rocke!"

"Well, you don't find that offensive, do you?" he

snapped. "I've nothing, of course, to do with your private relations with Mr. Windergate, but I should like to know whether you two are up to anything behind my back. I am perfectly certain that I am being shadowed."

"I know nothing of this," Ann assured him.

"Does Windergate believe that lift girl's cock-and-bull story?" he demanded.

"Why not ask him?"

"He is always engaged or out when I try to get hold of him."

"Mr. Windergate is a very busy man," she observed.

He looked at her steadily for a moment.

"You've nothing to say to me?"

"Nothing," she replied, boldly enough, but with a little choking in her throat.

"Very good," he concluded quietly. "You can go."

That night, Ann unburdened herself to her new friend.

"Mr. Windergate," she confided, "can't something be done about Mr. Rocke? He is getting absolutely unbearable. He knows that you are keeping away from him, he knows that I see you sometimes—he saw us, in fact, at the Milan together last night. He appealed to me, only this morning, to tell him what it all meant. I had to fence with him, and since then he hasn't spoken a word to me. He is looking so ill, too."

"You take a great interest in Mr. Rocke," Windergate remarked, a little jealously.

"Naturally," she answered. "Mr. Rocke and I have been through a great tragedy together. He is a little abrupt in his manner, but he has always meant to be kind. I can't bear to have him treat me as he is doing now."

"I suppose we shall have to come to an understanding very soon," Windergate admitted. "Stick it out for a few more days, please.—Now, what about a little dinner in the grillroom, and we can see the new film afterwards?"

She sighed.

"I don't feel like it to-night," she confessed. "I don't know why, but I feel thoroughly unsettled."

He eyed her curiously.

"Let me see, what is Rocke doing?" he asked.

"I sent you a copy of the page from his diary," she reminded him.

He nodded.

"I passed it on to Inspector Gresson," he said. "As a matter of fact, I remember, though. He is dining with Professor Mayer up at Hampstead. We might have a little dinner in the grillroom, then I'll just see how they are doing their job."

"You'll find me a very dull companion," she warned him.

"I'll take my risk," he decided.

At a few minutes past eleven that evening, a very dramatic little scene was being enacted in a street upon the outskirts of Hampstead; a short thoroughfare, with houses on either side standing well back from the road and protected by gardens of considerable extent.

The rows of trees lining the broad pavements interfered slightly with the illumination. Around one of the trees, a singular little group was gathered. A girl, apparently recovering from a faint, was seated on the ground with her back to a tree. There was a cut upon her forehead and a bruise upon her neck. She was ghastly pale and evidently in a terrified state. Standing by her side was a uniformed policeman with a notebook in his hand. A man who might have been a doctor was on the other side, and a young couple —a housemaid from one of the houses near, and her young man—were loitering arm-in-arm, looking on with keen interest. The girl was just finding strength to speak.

"My name is Amy Kinlake," she faltered. "I teach music. I have been playing accompaniments—at a house near. I was on my way home. A taxi overtook me—just here. A man got out and came towards me. I thought it must be some one I knew, or I should have called out. He advanced in quite an ordinary fashion, taking off his hat. Suddenly, he seized me and pressed a handkerchief against my mouth. There was a horrible smell—it wasn't chloroform—nothing like it—and—and——"

"Go on, miss, if you can," the constable begged.

"I couldn't move. I felt numb," she continued. "I think he must have lifted me into the taxicab when I gave a little scream that this gentleman must have heard. I suppose the man was frightened. He pushed me away and I fell down on the kerb. The taxicab drove off."

"Which way did it go?" the policeman asked.

"It turned the corner into Laburnum Road a moment ago."

"Can you describe the man?" the doctor enquired. "I have sent for my car, and when it comes I will take you home. In the meantime, in case you should lose consciousness again, tell us what he was like. I saw him myself, but I should like your description."

"So did we," the young man and the housemaid observed.

"Am I going to be ill, then?" the girl faltered.

"Most improbable," the doctor assured her. "At the same time, the drug which your assailant used is a strange one to me. I cannot tell what its effects may be. I should like you to tell us in your own words what the man was like. I will go on to the police station after I have taken you home."

The girl opened her lips. She was beginning to speak when her face seemed suddenly blanched once more with a new terror. She was looking along the strip of pavement which stretched towards the corner where the taxicab had disappeared. A man was walking along with brisk, even footsteps. As he came near, she shrieked.

"There he is!" she cried. "He's come back! Don't let him get near me!"

"Don't you be afraid, miss," the policeman answered. "If this is the man, we've got him, for sure."

They watched him curiously. At the last moment, seeing the little group upon the pavement, he hesitated. The policeman stepped forward.

"I'd like a word with you, sir," he said.

"What's the matter?" the newcomer demanded, approaching a little nearer.

"That's the man!" the girl exclaimed hysterically. "That's the man who dragged me into the taxi!"

"That's the man, right enough," the youth asserted. "I seen him distinctly under the light."

"It's he!" the girl moaned. "Keep him away!"

"Why he has returned I don't know," the doctor added to the policeman in an undertone; "but I'm certain that's the man I saw leaning out of the taxi-cab."

"You'll have to go to the station with me," the policeman told him, watching for any suspicious movement on the accused man's part.

"May I ask the charge?" the latter enquired.

"An assault upon this young lady," the policeman answered.

"Absurd!" was the contemptuous rejoinder. "My name is Daniel Rocke, and I am well known at the Foreign Office and the British Museum as an interpreter of codes and ciphers. I have just left Professor Mayer's house at the corner of the street."

Then Windergate appeared out of the gloom, followed by one of his henchmen.

"I want this man," he announced. "You know me I suppose, Constable—Inspector Windergate of the C.I.D."

"That's all right, sir," the constable replied, saluting.

The rescued man appeared a little stupefied, but it was not until he was in Windergate's car that he opened his mouth.

"What the hell is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"A plant of a sort," was the brief reply. "I'll tell you all about it now, if you like. It was the lift girl's story at your office which set me thinking. We're up against our old enemy again, and I tell you he's the most dangerous thing I ever struck, and the cleverest. He's studied you to some purpose, made up so that no two people could tell you apart. Even my own men have been baffled. He came to your office with the intention of killing you, shot that fellow Kasters, thinking he was you, and walked calmly out of the place. You arrived five minutes later, and that lift girl would have sworn till her dying day that you'd only left the flat that time ago. See the idea? Since then you've been shadowed. I guessed something of this sort would happen. We knew you were dining at Professor Mayer's, and that you would be coming this way before long. Londe might have really wanted to abduct the girl. He very likely did, if he could have done it safely. Anyhow, he did it, made up so that any one in the world would have given oath you were the assailant, threw the girl out when he saw that he couldn't get away with her, and made off for safety."

"Where are we going to now?"

"The Marylebone Police Station. We arrested the driver of his taxicab whilst he got out and walked to the corner of the street, and put one of our own men on the box. I told him to drive there without stopping. We've telephoned for constables to surround the cab directly it arrives."

"Why didn't you tell me what was going on, before?" was the somewhat pertinent enquiry.

"Because you'd have spoilt the game by always looking out for him," Windergate answered. "Besides, it was a police job, not yours. We needed you for a stalking-horse. All in your own interests, Rocke. The humour of it is—if it can be called humour—that your other self made advances to the lift girl which you failed to carry out. Hence her visit to your office. She turned informer entirely out of pique."

"Little hussy! But that fellow, Londe—he'll tumble to it, for certain. He'll get out of the cab before it reaches the police station."

"He won't do much good," Windergate replied. "I had two plain-clothes men on motor-bicycles, one each side of the cab."

The other laughed a little bitterly.

"Yours is a regular policeman's game," he scoffed. "I wish I'd known what you were up to. I'd have given you better advice."

"What do you mean?" Windergate demanded.

"I mean," was the contemptuous reply, "that you haven't a man in your Force with half the brains that Londe has. If you think he'll sit quietly in that taxi-cab and step out at the Marylebone Road Police Station, you're more ingenuous than I thought you."

"He hasn't one chance in fifty of getting away," Windergate declared.

His companion glanced out of the window. They had reached the spot which he had fixed upon in his mind.

"Neither have you," he answered, driving the knife

which he had suddenly drawn from his pocket, between the detective's shoulders.

Daniel Rocke was Windergate's first visitor. The latter was sitting up in bed, wasted but convalescent. The two men shook hands in a somewhat chastened manner.

"The lunatic's done us again," Windergate groaned. "Nearly did for me too. A fortieth part of an inch would have settled my hash."

"You had no suspicion?" Daniel asked curiously.

"Not the slightest. I was as certain that it was you who strolled up and whom I took away from the crowd, as I am about you at the present moment. You see what happened? Simple, but amazingly daring! Just the sort of thing a lunatic would have planned! Give me a tablespoonful of that whisky and some soda water, Rocke. I'm allowed it three times a day."

Daniel measured out the whisky generously, added the soda water, and passed it to the invalid, who swallowed it at a draught.

"The fellow had been shadowing you for a fortnight," Windergate proceeded. "He must have known you were dining at the Professor's, must have known what time you were likely to leave. He was in earnest about the girl, all right. When he found he couldn't bring that off, he made for his taxi. He saw that the driver had been changed, and tumbled to the whole thing, of course. Told him to stop at the Professor's and wait for a few minutes. We'd ordered the chauffeur to go anywhere he was directed first, so

long as he wound up at Marylebone Police Station. Two motorcyclists were to pick up the taxicab at the corner of the Avenue, as they did. Londe walked up that flagged path to the Professor's, and hid behind a shrub. In five minutes you were out. You thought the Professor had sent for a taxi, and stepped into it at once. They drove you to the police station, as per instructions. Londe comes out of the garden and sees the little crowd round the girl. He also sees me hanging round with the car. He bangs the Professor's gate behind him and walks casually up to us. It was the most audacious thing I have ever heard of. He gambled on my interference, and of course it came off. We talked together on the way to the station, and, believe me, I never doubted him for a moment. His voice seemed a bit thick, but I knew you had a cold. Then, all of a sudden—well, you know the rest."

"The first taxicab man was our greatest disappointment," Daniel observed. "His story turned out to be perfectly true. Londe picked him up in the Strand—did a bit of character-judging, no doubt—and offered him a tenner to do as he was told for the rest of the evening. The man had never seen Londe before, and was no help to us at all."

Windergate lay for a few moments with half-closed eyes.

"I suppose no one saw Londe get out of the car?" he asked presently.

"Not a soul," Daniel replied. "The driver had no idea there was anything wrong until he drew up at the police station. Londe disappeared like a stone thrown into a mountain tarn."

The nurse put her head in at the door. Daniel rose to his feet.

"Fine violets you've got there, Windergate," he remarked, glancing at the bowl by the side of the bed.

Windergate smiled somewhat sheepishly.

"Very kind of Miss Lancaster," he murmured. "She is coming to see me in a day or two."

Daniel nodded and turned away a little abruptly.

"Well, good-bye, old chap!" he said.

"One word more," Windergate begged, leaning a little forward in bed. "Only a word, nurse. We are going to get him, Rocke. Mind, that's a certainty."

Daniel opened his lips. The nurse intervened in peremptory fashion. She had seen the flush of colour in her patient's cheeks, and the hard light in his eyes.

"Not another word," she ordered—and was obeyed.

Daniel was curiously engrossed when he left the hospital. There was, indeed, plenty for him to think about. Somewhere, probably close at hand, this lunatic fiend was still at liberty, planning, perhaps, more horrible deeds, always waiting with stealthy zest to pit his cunning against the brains of the man who sought to compass his capture. There was danger lurking for Daniel at any street corner, in any lonely place, whilst this man lived. The drama of it was overpowering. Daniel found himself visualising the agony of the man, driven to madness by the constant though merciful use of his knife upon the screaming hordes of mangled sufferers. There was something terrible in the thought of that slowly growing madness, the sleepless nights, the visions and fancies, the slow slip-

ping away of reason—the man's soul perished, his whole being obsessed with horrible desires.

And side by side with the memory of these haunting horrors, there crept into Daniel's brain a curious depression, engendered by the sight of that bowl of violets and the sick man's self-conscious acknowledgment of them.

V

THE TENANT OF THE LIGHTHOUSE

COLONEL SIR FRANCIS WORTON, K.C.B., D.S.O., sometimes known as Q 20—the abbreviated designation of the Home Secret Service Department, which he had so successfully inaugurated—stretched himself out in Daniel Rocke's easy-chair and broached a subject which, to a man possessed of less self-confidence, might have presented embarrassments. But Worton, good fellow though he was universally admitted to be, was always a little pompous.

"Daniel," he confided, "I admire your secretary immensely."

"The devil you do!" Daniel replied, startled for a moment out of his habitual nonchalance.

"I like her manners," Sir Francis continued, "I like her appearance, I like her taste in clothes, and I adore the way she does her hair."

"Am I to understand, as you are making me the recipient of these confidences," Daniel enquired, taking off his glasses and wiping them, "that you are contemplating asking me for her hand in marriage?"

"Don't be an ass!" was the prompt rejoinder. "In the first place, if I wanted to marry her, I should ask her, and not you. And in the second place, I am, as

you know, a confirmed old bachelor. I was thinking of inviting her to lunch."

"Why not? Windergate was less punctilious. He used to take her out without asking me."

Sir Francis was visibly annoyed. Windergate had been his subordinate for many years, and there appeared to be something unseemly in the situation.

"Does he want to marry her?" he enquired.

"I should say he probably does," Daniel acknowledged.

His chief made a little grimace.

"Well, he's a good-looking fellow—fair income and all the rest of it. Why doesn't she marry him?"

Daniel stretched out his hand towards the bell.

"Shall we have her in and ask her?" he suggested.

"Don't be an ass!"

Daniel relaxed a little. His chief's annoyance at his subordinate's enterprise had appealed to his sense of humour.

"As a matter of fact," he confided, "I don't think Windergate or anybody else will have much of a look in just yet. I remember telling you her history. She is the daughter of the first man whom Londe did away with—the first we know of, that is to say. She doesn't think much of any of us for not having brought him to book before this. It was because she thought she had a chance of taking a hand in the game that she left the F.O. and came here to me."

Sir Francis nodded.

"I am not sure that I blame her for being a little disappointed," he observed maliciously. "You've had that fellow cornered two or three times, and allowed

him to get away. Windergate never ought to have let him slip through his fingers when he had him run to earth in that house on Salisbury Plain. Not your fault, of course. You're not a detective. You're supposed to use your brains in the matter and leave the executive part to the proper department. Windergate appears to have behaved like a village bumpkin."

"You have never been up against a lunatic, have you?" Daniel enquired.

"A lunatic," Sir Francis repeated. "That ought to make it all the easier."

"You obviously haven't studied the finer lights of criminology," Daniel remarked drily. "A clever man, who is mad on one point, and one only, is the most dangerous person in the world to tackle. I'd back the subtlety of his brain in all matters except the one, against yours or mine."

"I should certainly accept the challenge," Sir Francis declared, with a smile which only just escaped being patronising.

"You can accept it whenever you like," was the calm reply. "Londe is wanted, as you know, for several murders, and also by the lunacy commissioners. He is staying, at the present moment, at the Magnificent Hotel at Shoreborough!"

There was a brief pause. Worton failed to grasp the situation.

"What the devil do you mean?" he demanded.

"Precisely what I have said."

"But if you know that he is there, why aren't you doing something about it?"

It was Daniel's turn to smile ironically.

"We did something about it each time before," he reminded his chief, "and somehow or other we didn't quite get our hands upon Londe. This time we must alter our tactics a little. We must go more warily. I am convinced that he is at the Magnificent 'from information received,' as Windergate would put it. But the most certain thing on earth is that if either Miss Lancaster, Windergate or I were to put in an appearance there, he'd be off before we had even looked in the visitors' book."

"How did you come by your information?" Sir Francis not unnaturally enquired.

"Windergate, of course, is shrewd enough so far as he goes," Daniel admitted. "He discovered some time ago that Londe *will* have the *Lancet* every week and *will* have it sent to him direct. He's been on the wrong track once or twice in hunting down mysterious subscribers. This time, however, I rather think the finger points the right way. The *Lancet* is being sent to the Magnificent to a Doctor Benson. No such person is known there under that name, yet the paper is always claimed."

"The assumption being, I suppose——"

"That some one enters the office at a moment when there is no one about and takes the paper out of the rack," Daniel interrupted. "The conclusion one must arrive at is that the pseudo-Doctor Benson is either almost a resident at the hotel or some one connected with it."

"Can't you have the place watched by a local detective—a stranger to Londe?" Sir Francis suggested.

"We had that done last week," Daniel replied, a

little wearily. "The *Lancet* disappeared just the same."

Sir Francis held out his hand.

"Pass me the A.B.C.," he begged. "It is time I took a hand in the game."

"If you are successful," Daniel observed, "there will be no trouble about that luncheon so far as Miss Lancaster is concerned."

Sir Francis made not the slightest secret of his visit to the Magnificent at Shoreborough. He booked his rooms under his own name, went to great pains to procure the window table he desired, made an absurd fuss about an imaginary game leg, walked always with a stick, sat outside all the morning reading the papers, talked to every one in the lounge about the wonderful air, and played bridge in the afternoons at one of the clubs. His plans were well made and no one would have surmised that his valet was an experienced detective, and that he had in his sitting room a copy of the *dossiers* of each guest who had stayed in the hotel during the last month. At the end of three days he was prepared to scoff at the idea of Londe's being, or having been at any recent period, a visitor there. On the psychological day, however, the Thursday, when the *Lancet* was delivered, there was a dramatic change in the situation. The copy of the paper was surreptitiously removed from the pigeonhole in which it had been placed, notwithstanding the vigilance of three or four people, and the waiter, a young Frenchman, who had served Sir Francis, was picked up at the bottom of the cliffs, a mile or so out of the town, with a broken

neck and sundry very suspicious wounds in the back of his head. Sir Francis paid a brief visit to the police station, asked for his bill, and telephoned to Daniel.

"I am coming up to town for an hour, by the eleven-forty," he announced. "You had better arrange to come back with me. Windergate is on his way down and I want to bring another man I know of."

"I will be ready," Daniel promised. "Pity you seem to have let the fellow slip through your fingers."

"Eleven-forty," Sir Francis repeated. "I'll come straight round to see you after I have called for a moment at my rooms."

Sir Francis, however, neither called upon Daniel that day nor returned to his rooms, and within twenty-four hours every newspaper in London was announcing in prominent headlines:

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE
of a
WELL-KNOWN GOVERNMENT
OFFICIAL.

Worton spent the first of those feverish days following his disappearance in pain, discomfort, and fear. He had a blurred but more or less connected recollection of his taxicab having been stopped in a block of vehicles at the entrance to the station; of a man putting his head in at the open window as though to ask a question; of a faint odour, followed by an amazing paralysis of mind and body. He did as he was told weakly and tremblingly. Assisted by his guide he

stepped out of the vehicle, entered the station, passed across the bridge to the arrival platform, left the station again, entered a closed motor-car and was driven rapidly away. His guide had taken the seat by the chauffeur, and he found himself next to a woman who, even in those blurred minutes, he seemed to realise, was beautiful. He found strength to ask her a faltering question. She smiled, patted his hand, and made an evasive but encouraging reply. He had the feeling that he must have been taken ill and was slowly recovering consciousness.—Presently the car left the road for a narrow lane. They bumped their way across a field with the sea in full view, and stopped before what appeared to be a lighthouse—a white-plastered, round building. A lighthouse! The whole thing was too ridiculous. There followed a period of further oblivion.

When once more he recovered consciousness he was lying on a plain hard mattress in a small circular room, with white-washed walls and ceiling, and with the only window high up and far out of reach from his recumbent position. His first impressions were that he really had met with an accident and was in hospital. Looking down at him, critically, was a keen-faced man of powerful appearance. His clothes were covered by a long white duster. By his side stood the woman who had ridden with him from the station.

"Where am I?" Worton gasped. "What has happened?"

"You are in good hands," was the calm reply. "Lie still."

The tenant of the lighthouse stooped down and felt

the prostrate man's pulse. Then he turned to the woman.

"Most annoying," he declared. "An absolutely perfect subject."

Then the whole truth came like a swaying flood of horror to the man who lay there powerless. These two could be no others than Londe, the lunatic butcher-surgeon, with his lunatic wife—the murderer of Miss Lancaster's father, of the travellers on Salisbury Plain, without doubt, too, of the waiter whose body had been picked up at the bottom of this very range of cliffs. He was in their power. This rude apartment was to be their operating chamber. He felt himself in the clutches of chill fear.

"Where the devil am I, and what do you want with me?" he gasped.

"I will explain," the other replied courteously. "I am Sir Joseph Londe, the Australian surgeon, of whom you must have heard. I saved thousands of lives in the war—I, and the lady here, who was my head nurse and who is now my wife. Unfortunately, although I am a strong man, the strain was too great for me. I went mad."

"Mad!" Sir Francis muttered mechanically.

"Precisely. One little corner of my brain alone is affected—a matter of discolouration. I need a small transfusion of what is vulgarly called 'grey matter'—the very smallest quantity you can imagine. Yet, believe me, my dear sir, I find it almost an impossible thing to find a brain which will afford me just what I want."

Sir Francis prayed for strength, prayed that, after

his life of bravery, he might not end it a coward. The weariness was still in his limbs.

"Why have you chosen me for a subject?" he demanded.

"Because you are a clever man," was the prompt reply, "and I should say a remarkably sane one. Also because you and your friend Rocke are becoming a little troublesome to me. I nearly had a look at Rocke's brain once, but a girl stepped in. It was a pity."

"You know that this is murder?" Worton muttered, dimly aware all the time of the futility of his question.

"That is a most ignorant and absurd remark," Londe retorted, with some signs of anger. "I have saved thousands of lives. Surely I have a right to one or two when it is a question of restoring one of the greatest intellects in the surgical world. All that I require is a man's brain free from any red patch. I have great hopes of yours."

Sir Francis was slowly recovering his courage.

"My brain," he declared, "is covered with red patches."

"I don't believe it," was the firm rejoinder. "You are not the sort of man to have a discoloured brain.—Judith! Can you see anything yet?"

The woman, who had been standing at the window, turned away.

"Nothing," she answered.

Londe's face was black with momentary anger. He looked down apologetically at his prospective victim.

"You resent this delay without a doubt," he observed. "So do I. The fact is, there has been such a fuss in the newspapers and amongst the police about

a recent subject of mine upon whom I experimented a few days ago, that my wife thought it as well to conceal my surgical instruments for a short time. I have sent for them, however, and they ought to be here at any moment."

"Will you tell me," Sir Francis asked, "what that accursed stuff is that you used upon me at the station? It seems to have taken all my strength away."

Londe smiled complacently.

"The use of that stuff, as you call it," he declared, "will, in due course, be proclaimed as the greatest scientific discovery of the war era. I am leaving the formula to the College of Surgeons, when I have finished with it. With a single whiff I can make a baby of the strongest man—he has no will and very little strength. With a double whiff it becomes a perfect and marvellous anæsthetic. When operating on you, for instance, you will feel nothing—two whiffs and then eternity."

"Most consoling," Worton muttered.

Londe joined his wife for a moment at the window. Then he turned away towards the door.

"I have some indifferent implements in an old case," he confided. "I will examine them. Make yourself comfortable, Sir Francis, until my return. Judith!"

He left the room and the woman turned slowly away from the window. She came to the side of the couch and looked down at her husband's prisoner meditatively. Notwithstanding a certain air of anxiety, she was a very beautiful and a very attractive woman. Sir Francis tried to keep the horror from his eyes.

She was after all a human being. There must be a weak spot somewhere.

"You can't mean to stand by and see your husband commit murder," he pleaded.

She seemed puzzled.

"I have stood by while he has done his work a hundred times," she replied. "Many died. They did not call it murder then."

"But that was when they would have died anyhow, if the operation had not succeeded," he reminded her. "I am not wounded. What have I done that he should help himself to my life?"

"He gave his reason and mind for your countrymen," she pointed out. "It is only fair that one of them should repay him. But wait."

She held up her finger and listened for a moment. On the floor below they could hear Londe's restless movements. She leaned towards the helpless man.

"I will show you something," she whispered.

She crossed the room and lifted up a pile of sacking which lay in the corner. Underneath was a long black case, on which was a silver shield.

"What is that?" he demanded.

She raised the lid, took something out from the case, and turned towards him with a smile. She held out a short but deadly-looking knife. A ray of fugitive sunshine fell upon its blue, highly-tempered blade.

"The case of surgical instruments," she confided. "He thinks I sent them away. I didn't. I hid them here."

A gleam of hope restored Sir Francis's courage. Perhaps, after all, then, this woman was human.

"Put it back quickly," he begged. "Your husband might come in."

She obeyed him and replaced the matting with elaborate carelessness.

"You do not wish me to be butchered, then?" he asked eagerly.

The slightest of frowns disturbed the serenity of her beautiful countenance.

"It is not that," she explained. "I think that my husband has the right to do whatever he chooses in order to regain his reason, but there is always such a fuss afterwards."

"A fuss," he repeated weakly.

She nodded.

"Yes. Every one is against us. Every one objects. We have to go into hiding and it is so uncomfortable. I hate living in strange places and wandering about like shadows. I want a house in the country with a garden where there are a great many rose trees. I want to take care of them like children, to spray them and prune them and talk to them every morning. Some day the blossoms will come. Then I shall christen them all separately. I shall know them all by name. That will be wonderful."

Worton felt his strength slowly returning. He sat up on the couch.

"Of course you realise that you too are mad?" he asked bluntly.

As the words left his lips he knew that he had made a stupid and unpardonable mistake. Her beautiful mouth parted into ugly lines, her eyes shot fire, her silken eyebrows became one long menacing

line. It was significant that her tone was not raised.

"You have insulted me," she declared. "You will be sorry."

She looked towards the door. He rose to his feet unsteadily but with rapidly growing strength.

"Forgive me," he begged. "I can't imagine what I was thinking about to say such a thing. That infernal drug took away my wits as well as my strength."

She paused irresolutely and looked at him. Notwithstanding his dishevelled appearance he was a very good-looking man.

"You call me mad," she said, lowering her voice a little and holding the latch of the door in her hand; "yet it is you who are a fool. You seem to want your life, yet you insult *me—me,* who could give it to you. You do not plead with me; you do not try soft words. I let a man go free once for the sake of a kiss that pleased me. Joseph was very angry—but he never knew about the kiss."

Worton made an effort.

"You are very beautiful," he sighed; "but I am a drugged man.—If you look at me like that I shall not care whether you give me my life or not, so long as I have the kiss."

She laughed and the anger passed from her face. She turned towards him.

"For one moment," she murmured, "I will see how it seems to feel your arms around me. If it pleases me—you shall live."

Something helped him—a touch of man's passion for the unusual, perhaps. He held her in his arms and their lips met. A moment later she drew away,

gracefully and with reluctance. Her cheeks were flushed. She laughed at him kindly.

"I will do my best," she promised. "You shall live."

Almost immediately they heard Londe's footsteps upon the stairs. He came in, bearing an open case in his hand. He laid it down upon a chair.

"I fear that I shall have to apologise for my apparent clumsiness," he said, turning towards his prisoner with a knife in his hands. "These are very inferior affairs. Fortunately, however, you will not realise the difference."

Worton stepped backwards. He saw the black tube protruding from the other's waistcoat pocket and the fingers stealing towards it.

"Why not wait for the others," he suggested.

Londe shook his head.

"I have waited all day," he replied. "I shall wait no longer. They are making such a terrible fuss about you in the papers, too. It is time we were away."

The woman laid her hand upon his arm.

"You are absurd," she remonstrated. "Don't you realise that when this man's body is found, a report will be made on the wounds in his head by an English doctor—an *English* doctor, mind. Do you want to lose your great reputation. You shall not! I forbid it!"

He hesitated for a moment. Then he threw down the knife gloomily.

"I wish to heaven I had never let you send the other case away," he muttered.

He walked up and down the room furiously, his hands in his pockets, pausing every now and then to

look impatiently out of the window. He drew nearer and nearer to the pile of matting. The other two watched him with fascinated eyes. The sight of the untidy heap seemed to irritate him. Impatiently he gave it a savage kick. The case was disclosed. He threw himself upon it with the cry of a wild animal. Then he turned around, holding it under his arm. He moved a step nearer to the man and woman who watched him. One hand already held the black tube. The fingers of the other were stealing towards the fastening of the case.

Telephone, telegraph and 60-h.p. Rolls-Royce worked together for the life of Sir Francis Worton, K.C.B., D.S.O. Daniel Rocke, Windergate, Captain Milton, the Chief Constable of the County, and the manager of the Hotel Magnificent, met together in conference in the latter's office, within a few hours of the time when Worton's disappearance had become an established fact.

"The taxicab driver?" was Daniel's first question, after they had settled down to concrete discussion.

"A most respectable man, owning his own cab," the Chief Constable declared. "He has had an unblemished licence for seventeen years, first as a cab, and now as a taxicab driver. Ask him all the questions you like from an informative point of view, but don't waste time with him. All that he knows is that his fare was spoken to, apparently by an acquaintance, whom he cannot describe, at the entrance to the station; that he must have descended without his noticing the fact; and that he never saw him again."

"We will accept that," Daniel decided. "Now with regard to the station officials?"

"They have been thoroughly rounded up," the other assured him, "but very little information has been gained. It was a busy time, and all we have been able to gather is that the two men probably left the station by the south entrance and entered a car on the other side. We are doing our best to trace all the cars present that evening."

"Too slow for us these methods, although they, of course, are necessary," Daniel admitted. "We must begin at the other end. About this young waiter who was murdered? When is the inquest?"

"To-morrow," Captain Milton replied.

"Is there any unusual evidence to be offered?"

The Chief Constable nodded.

"In a way there is," he assented. "The young man had evidently come into possession of money lately. He appears to have bought a bicycle and a good many new clothes. He took a ride most afternoons."

"Always in the same direction?" Daniel asked eagerly.

"Precisely. The direction of West Shoreborough."

"Can we have the head waiter in?"

That functionary was summoned. The Chief Constable coughed.

"You will excuse my pointing out, Mr. Rocke," he ventured, "that it is the disappearance of Sir Francis Worton which we are investigating."

Daniel nodded.

"We are going backwards for reasons I will explain to you presently," he replied. "I am only interested

in saving my Chief's life, and there isn't any time to spare. The murderer of that young man is also the abductor of Sir Francis."

The head waiter made his appearance. Daniel asked him questions with almost lightning-like rapidity.

"How many tables had William Morton, the young waiter who was murdered, to look after?"

"Eight, sir. In the very busy season, nine."

"Can you remember any occupant of any of the tables looked after by him, who seemed to take a special interest in the young man?"

The waiter reflected.

"There was a middle-aged gentleman staying here—I think he must have been a doctor—who used to give him extra tips and talk to him a great deal. He had an invalid wife who never left her sitting room. This was some weeks ago, though."

"Name, please, and why did you think he was a doctor?" Daniel asked, drawing on his coat.

"The gentleman's name was Fox, sir, and I thought he might be a doctor because he read the *Lancet* a good deal."

Daniel waved him away.

"Which house agent does the most business on the western outskirts of the town?" he asked the Chief Constable abruptly.

"Fellows & Company," was the wondering reply. "They have a branch office just outside."

"Quick as you can, please, gentlemen," Daniel begged, leading the way from the room. "We're overdue at that branch office!"

The final scene possessed a little drama of its own. As they bumped across the rough road down to the lighthouse, recently let on lease to a Mr. and Mrs. Fox, they saw a wild-looking figure stagger from the doorway and make his way to the edge of the cliff. He had on neither coat, waistcoat, nor collar; his hair was unkempt, his footsteps unsteady. They tumbled out of the car and rushed towards him.

"Thank God, you're safe!" Daniel exclaimed. "Where's Londe? Where are they?"

Sir Francis pointed downwards with trembling forefinger. On the sands, hundreds of feet below, a woman was standing, looking up. Behind her, a few yards from land, a powerfully built petrol launch was moving slowly about, and, in mid-air, already halfway down, a man was descending a thin rope ladder. Daniel's eyes flashed as he pointed to him.

"There's the man you want, sir," he cried fiercely. "There's the man who murdered that young waiter and——"

"And by God he nearly had me!" Sir Francis interrupted.

Captain Milton smiled as he looked over the cliff.

"A clever idea, this escape, I suppose," he remarked indulgently, "although a trifle melodramatic—more suited for a cinema stunt than real life. They can go off in that launch in whatever direction they like and as far as their petrol will take them, but they can no more escape now than if the handcuffs were already upon their wrists. Every coastguard station, harbour master and lighthouse keeper within a hundred miles will have their description within half an hour. Take

the car and start work, Stedman," he directed, turning to the inspector who had accompanied him. "Mr. Windergate had better go with you. You can send something back for us."

The man saluted and hurried off. Suddenly a dust-covered figure sprang from a station taxicab and staggered towards them. It was Ann, breathless and white with excitement.

"Where is he?" she demanded.

Daniel took her by the arm and pointed over the edge of the cliff. Londe was nearly halfway down now and descending with incredible rapidity.

"Why do you stand here and do nothing?" she cried furiously. "Do you want him to escape?"

The Chief Constable remained unperturbed.

"The handcuffs are as good as upon his wrists," he assured her.

Ann gave one glance at Daniel and pointed towards the steel hooks of the ladder, which had been secured to the remains of a wooden bench. Daniel nodded and took a quick step forward.

"You may be right," he muttered, "but I've seen that man escape when the odds were a hundred to one against him. Why take any risks?"

The Chief Constable frowned. Officially, he felt bound to assert himself.

"That's murder," he protested.

"Is it?" was Daniel's vicious comment as he flung himself on the ground. "If I had met him face to face I should have put a bullet through him, without waiting for questions. As it is—we'll try a hundred-foot drop on to the shingle."

"And God bless you for it!" Ann sobbed.

Daniel wrenched away the grappling irons and the ladder collapsed. They leaned over the edge of the cliff. Londe seemed for a moment to fall backwards, making desperate efforts to clutch at the scrub and fragments of rock jutting out from the face of the cliff. Then he turned a complete somersault in the air and went hurtling through space. They could almost hear the thud with which he fell. He lay spread-eagled upon the pebbles, motionless and still.

"Good work," Daniel declared savagely. "Let's get down and look at him. There's a pathway a little further along."

It was one of the few wild moments of Daniel Rocke's admirably controlled life. He felt a soft, warm hand in his. Ann's face was aflame with exultation. Her eyes adored him. Then a wondering cry from Milton and an oath from Sir Francis brought them once more to the edge of the cliff. They looked down. No one seemed able to find any words.—Londe was on his feet. He was walking towards the boat, walking slowly, but without unsteadiness. By his side was the woman, moving across the sands with slim and effortless grace. A thick-set man, with a south-wester pulled over his forehead, held out his hand from the boat and she sprang in with the light buoyancy of a girl. Londe walked calmly through the waves and followed her over the side. Already the engine was at work. They were making for the open sea. Man and woman stood together, looking up at the cliff top. Their expressions were undistinguishable. They made no gesture or movement. Then the woman

turned and entered the cabin. The boat still headed oceanwards, travelling at an amazing pace. Londe moved to the prow and remained there, dark and sombre, his back turned towards the land, his face to the horizon. He was like Columbus, with a still undiscovered world before him.

"An eighty-foot drop," Daniel muttered, "and he fell on his back!"

The Chief Constable looked downwards superciliously. He was still entirely self-assured.

"He probably has internal injuries," he remarked. "In any case I have given orders that they are to be brought back to Shoreborough."

VI

A YOUNG MAN'S KISS

"THE boy who made that fire was a fool," Daniel Rocke grumbled, as he divested himself of his coat and muffler. "First warm day for a long time, and the silly young ass builds a furnace that would roast an ox."

Miss Ann Lancaster looked up from her task of arranging a little pile of letters upon the desk. She was carrying a newspaper in her hand.

"I made the fire," she confessed. "I am so sorry if it doesn't please you. I thought it was rather a good fire," she added, glancing at it reflectively.

"Too big—much too big," her employer grunted.

"You've complained that the room seemed damp to you in the mornings, the last few days," she reminded him. "I thought you'd better have a good fire and then open the window."

"I should catch my death of cold with the window open at the back of my neck," he objected.

She closed the discussion with a little toss of the head.

"I am sorry," she said impenitently. "Do you mind looking at this newspaper? There seems to be rather a curious disappearance reported. I will wait while you read it, if I may."

Daniel pointed to a chair and nodded. Then he bent over the newspaper and read the paragraph which she had marked.

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE
of a
SOMERSETSHIRE GENTLEMAN.

A most extraordinary case of disappearance in which the aid of Scotland Yard has been invoked by the local police is reported from South Fawley, a small village on the boundaries of Somerset and Devon. It appears that at about five o'clock on Thursday afternoon, Mr. Gerald Oakes, of South Fawley Hall, left home with the intention of shooting a few rabbits in the confines of the Park. He was seen to leave the gun-room, cross a paddock, and enter a small wood through which a footpath leads to the village. Two shots were heard, and a recently killed rabbit was subsequently picked up in the wood. At seven o'clock, as Mr. Oakes had not returned, one of the gamekeepers went to look for him. Later on a search party was instituted and the further woods and all possible places where an accident could have occurred were thoroughly explored, but without result. The local police have come to the end of their resources, and a representative from Scotland Yard is now upon the spot. Mr. Oakes has only lately succeeded to the property and is a young man of considerable wealth and a well-known athlete. He is of cheerful disposition, exceedingly popular, and there is not the slightest cause to suspect that he is in trouble of any sort. Only a few minutes before leaving the house, he in-

structed his butler to telephone to some neighbours, asking them to dine that evening. Loss of memory seems to be the only possible explanation of his absence, but how he could have disappeared on the verge of the village where he was born and bred is entirely inexplicable.

Daniel finished the paragraph and leaned back in his chair. He took off his spectacles and polished them. Ann came over and stood by his side.

"Not much use to us, I am afraid," she remarked.

"On the face of it, no," he admitted.

She waited patiently, as she had learnt to do. There was a reserve in his manner which indicated reflection.

"I fear," he continued at last, a little irritably, "that I am losing my memory—breaking up all round, in fact. I have seen the name of that village, South Fawley, somewhere, within the last twenty-four hours."

"Probably in connection with this affair," she suggested.

"No," he snapped.

"Yesterday," she reflected, "you had Professor Moon in to see you. You left early for lunch to keep an appointment with Sir Francis at Whitehall House. You were late back—you must have called at one of the second-hand bookshops, for you were carrying that volume of De Quincey you showed me——"

"Stop," he interrupted. "You have solved the mystery. It was an address label in the bookshop.

I saw it on the top of a pile of volumes. Put on your hat, Miss Lancaster, at once."

She obeyed promptly.

"Do you wish me to go anywhere?" she enquired.

"I wish you to accompany me," he directed.

They left the office together, walked up Shaftesbury Avenue to the Charing Cross Road, and entered the bookshop at the corner. A little pile of volumes stood in front of one of the shelves, covered by a sheet of brown paper. The addressed label was still there. They both bent over it.

The Rev. Gordon Maseley,
The Vicarage,
South Fawley,
SOMERSET.

"A clergyman," Ann exclaimed, some disappointment in her tone. "The vicar of the place, I suppose."

"Let us see what his taste in books is, anyhow," Daniel remarked.

He lifted the edge of the brown paper, glanced, carelessly at first and then eagerly, at the little row of volumes. He stood transfixed. The manager of the shop strolled over to him.

"Queer hobby for a clergyman, Mr. Rocke," the latter observed. "This Mr. Maseley sent me thirty pounds and gave me a list of standard modern works on lunacy he wished sent down to him. I am just waiting for Hobson's 'Diseases of the Brain' to send the parcel off. I expect it to-day."

"Is this gentleman, Mr. Maseley, an old customer?" Daniel enquired, turning over one of the volumes.

"I never heard of him before," the manager admitted. "I dare say he has bought books in the shop. He must have done, I should say, or he couldn't have known that the collection of any sort of medical or scientific books is rather a hobby of mine. Does he happen to be a friend of yours, sir?"

"I could tell if I saw his handwriting," Daniel replied. "Have you his original letter?"

"I am not sure, sir."

The man made his way to the office and reappeared a moment or two later, with a sheet of notepaper in his hand.

"Nothing doing," he announced. "The order came typewritten on a sheet of the vicarage notepaper, and in the third person—'The Rev. Maseley,' etc. I should think these country clergymen in quiet places would sometimes go nearly out of their minds without a hobby."

Daniel nodded, a little grimly.

"The 'Rev. Maseley's' hobby," he remarked, "appears to be rather an unusual one."

Ann could scarcely wait until they got back to the office, although Daniel's silence was significant.

"Well?" she demanded, looking round eagerly as soon as she had removed her hat.

"The matter is worth investigating," Daniel pronounced. "Especially——" he hesitated. There were one or two points in the *dossier* of the man whom they sought which he had kept to himself.

"Go on, please," she begged, as she hung up her hat and followed him into his office. "Don't keep me waiting."

"Especially as, before he practised surgery he was on the stage for several months, and afterwards appears to have taken orders," Daniel concluded. "He certainly filled a curacy in Melbourne for some short time."

Pale, as one who had passed through a long illness and still lingers between life and death, Gerald Oakes, for whom the police of Somerset and the myrmidons of Scotland Yard were scouring the country, lay on a pallet bed within a few hundred yards of his home, in a long, bare apartment, built as an annexe to the vicarage by a former incumbent of South Fawley, who was more remarkable for his large family than either his parish work or his eloquence in the pulpit. By his side stood Londe, in clerical riding suit of grey. He had just returned from visiting a parishioner at a distant farmhouse, and was now engaged in feeling the young man's pulse.

"Quite satisfactory," he pronounced, after a moment's silence. "I must congratulate you, my young friend. You have a marvellous constitution. You are one of my least troublesome subjects."

"Exactly what does that mean?" the young man enquired weakly.

"It means that you have a constitution like a piece of machinery," Londe explained. "I know exactly by your symptoms how much of my treatment you require to keep you in a certain state of quiescence."

"Blast your treatment!" Gerald Oakes muttered.

Londe smiled.

"It is very unreasonable of you to be annoyed," he protested. "You must give and take in this world."

The young man stared at him wearily for a moment.

"Are you a madman?" he asked at last. "I suppose you must be, although I can't see how you are able to escape detection in the church and amongst all these country people, if you really are. You seemed all right the night you dined at the Hall. Yet you must be mad. No sane man murders without a motive."

"Not mad," Londe denied earnestly, "although, alas! I must plead guilty to one slight weakness. Except for that, I think I can safely say that I am one of the cleverest men in this country."

"One slight weakness," the young man repeated wonderingly.

"Precisely," Londe assented. "A weakness which, with your help and the help of some books I am expecting to-morrow, I hope to be able to cure permanently. I have tried before, but each time I have failed. I have come to the conclusion that there is one slight detail where I make a mistake."

"Detail! My help!" Gerald Oakes muttered. "What the hell use am I, lying here—to anybody? If I could but raise my arm——"

He lifted it feebly. Londe smiled.

"Yes," he said, "I expect you would be dangerous but for the treatment, although even at my age, I believe that I am a stronger man than you. You

would like a couple of glasses of port, wouldn't you, or a pint of champagne?"

"I'd like to get you by the throat and strangle the life out of you," was the shuddering reply.

"You are unreasonable," Londe assured him earnestly. "Many a man who caught a young fellow like you kissing his wife would have been far more violent than I have been."

Gerald Oakes moved in his place uneasily.

"It was an impulse," he muttered. "I don't know what came over me."

"Your vicar's wife," Londe went on sternly. "And, according to your story, the first time you had ever spoken to her, except at your own dining table."

"I shouldn't have spoken to her at all," the young man explained, "but she was frightened at the report of my gun. I didn't see her coming, and I shot a rabbit in the path. Afterwards I walked home with her —she asked me in—while we were in the drawing-room——"

"Precisely," Londe interrupted sarcastically. "Spare me the harrowing details. Then you looked up, and there was I in the doorway."

"Damn you, yes!"

Londe smiled.

"I might have killed you at once," he observed. "As a matter of fact, I am not going to kill you at all."

"If ever I get out of here alive," the young man began earnestly——

"Now, don't threaten," the other interrupted. "Can't you see for yourself how foolish that is?

Besides, you are really an exceedingly fortunate young man. A few months ago, or even a few months later, I should probably have attempted an experiment on you which would have involved the loss of your life. As it is—well, you will be shooting rabbits again in an evening or so. Let me see."

Londe glanced at his watch and picked up his hat.

"It is time I paid my afternoon call upon your mother," he announced. "You will be glad to know that I go to the Hall every day to talk to her, and keep her cheerful. She is bearing up wonderfully, considering—wonderfully. She has made one mistake, however, which has annoyed me very much. She has called in help from Scotland Yard. Such a reflection upon the police of the district!"

"I wish you'd go," Gerald Oakes murmured peevishly. "I hate the sound of your voice."

"What manners!" Londe sighed. "Your host, too! Well, I shall tear myself away for a little time. I'm going to the Hall now. To-morrow, in all probability, you may be there yourself."

The young man turned on his side and looked curiously at Londe who stood on the threshold, his broad clerical hat in one hand, and his riding-whip in the other.

"If I *am* there, what do you suppose I shall do about you?" he demanded.

Londe smiled.

"I suppose I shall have to take my chance," he admitted. "You will not be too severe, I trust. Remember—that you had your kiss!"

The young man lay on his couch and watched the

sombrely clad figure swing down the garden path. He was terrified at the confusion of thought into which he had fallen. He could not remember how long he had lain in this hateful apartment, how long since he had eaten or drank. Everything seemed unsteady and obscure since the one dramatic moment when he had drawn away from the lips of that strange, bewildering woman, thrilled, yet filled with an instinctive apprehension, and had looked up to find her husband standing in the doorway. It had all seemed so natural. Londe's attitude was one of pained and dignified surprise. The young man had felt heartily ashamed of himself. He had begun to stammer out his faltering apologies to the grave, advancing figure. Then he had imagined that he was going to be shot. There was something black in Londe's suddenly outstretched hand—a faint jet of vapour, a giving way of heart and senses, a strange, stupefying falling away of consciousness. He only remembered two cold grey eyes watching him through a strange mist.

The door was quietly opened. The woman came in. Notwithstanding his weakness, the young man's heart began to beat more quickly. She made a little gesture of silence and came towards him—a superbly graceful figure, with what seemed to be a compassionate light in her beautiful eyes.

"I am so sorry," she whispered.

"For God's sake tell me if your husband is mad?" he begged. "What is he doing with me? I seem half-dazed all the time. I can't even remember how long I have been here."

"Hush!" she replied soothingly. "No, he is not

mad. He is much angrier than he seems. He is very jealous."

She smiled at him, but there was none of the gallant left in Gerald Oakes.

"Can't you help me to get out of here?" he pleaded.

She was thoughtful for a moment.

"You need a little more strength," she decided. "Could you drink a glass of wine?"

"Rather!" he assured her eagerly.

She looked out of the window for a moment. Londe was making his way across the Park. Then she left the room and returned almost immediately with a wine glass filled with port.

"Drink this quickly," she invited. "It may give you strength enough to stand up."

He took the glass and drank its contents. For a moment a new life seemed to throb in his pulses, and then blankness swept over him. He threw up his arms.

"Oh, my God!" he sobbed. "The clouds are coming again."

He fell back. The woman leaned over him, smoothing his hair, her fingers resting upon his cheeks. His eyes closed, his breathing became regular, although his colour was ghastly. Apparently he slept.

To Ann, already attired for the journey, the paragraph in the midday edition which she had just bought, was a great disappointment. Nevertheless she took the newspaper into Daniel's room and showed it to him.

"I think you ought to see this before we start, Mr.

Rocke," she said, with a sigh of regret. "I suppose it's no use going now."

Daniel took the paper from her hand. There was a great headline over the paragraph to which she pointed.

END OF THE SOUTH FAWLEY MYSTERY.

MR. GERALD OAKES DISCOVERED IN WOOD WHERE HE DISAPPEARED.

Mr. Gerald Oakes was discovered early this morning by one of his gamekeepers, seated with his back to a tree, and fast asleep, within a few yards of the spot from which he disappeared some days ago. His gun was by his side and, although a little exhausted, his health appears to be unimpaired. He is unable, however, to offer any explanation as to his absence from home, and subsequent adventures. He cannot even remember how he found his way back to the scene of his disappearance. The incident is the more surprising inasmuch as there is no hiding-place of any sort in the wood, and the whole neighbourhood for miles around had been scoured for days by the police.

Later.

Our special correspondent, on calling at South Fawley Hall, learns that Mr. Oakes, although in excellent health, is quite unable to account for his disappearance, and was only persuaded with difficulty that four days had elapsed since he had left home. His last conscious recollection is of shooting a rabbit crossing the path, after which he remembers nothing until he was awakened by the gamekeeper four days later.

Daniel Rocke laid down the paper.

"A sell, after all, then," he observed.

"I am afraid so," Ann sighed, thinking regretfully of that long drive into the perfumed Somersetshire lanes. "Shall I send the car away?"

Daniel appeared to be immersed in a brown study. When she repeated her question, however, he shook his head.

"A day or two in the country will do us no harm," he decided. "Besides, I am still a little curious about that clergyman who makes a study of lunacy.—Have you got the letter from Sir Francis?"

"It came a few minutes ago," Ann told him.

"Then we'll start."

The butler at South Fawley Hall looked doubtfully at the card and letter which Daniel handed to him on the following afternoon.

"Mr. Oakes is seeing no one, sir," he announced.

"Give him the letter, please," Daniel begged.

"You are not connected with the Press, sir?"

"Not in any way."

The butler took the letter and returned almost immediately. A few minutes later, Daniel and Ann were shown into the library and were shaking hands with the hero of the South Fawley mystery. To them he appeared a tall, good-looking young man, with a pleasant expression, at the present moment completely spoilt by a nervous twist of the lips and an uneasy light which shone every now and then in his eyes.

"Sir Francis is an old friend of my father's," he said, as he motioned them to chairs. "Naturally, I

cannot send you away. At the same time, I don't understand your position exactly. You're not a detective, are you—or the young lady?"

Daniel shook his head.

"I am really a Foreign Office expert on ciphers," he confided, "and the young lady is my secretary. When Sir Francis was appointed to his present position, he offered me a post under him, which I have filled for a short time, but only with one object."

"Kind of Home Secret Service business, isn't it?" the young man enquired listlessly.

"Something of that sort," Daniel acknowledged. "My own interest in it, however, is simply concerned with the pursuit of one man, a dangerous criminal, who is also a lunatic. I was very nearly one of his victims myself."

"I am afraid if you are connecting him in any way with my little affair, you'll be disappointed," Gerald Oakes remarked. "I may as well tell you at once that I have not been robbed of a penny directly or indirectly."

"The man of whom I am in search does not commit his crimes for financial reasons," Daniel declared. "However, I do not wish to take up your time. I want to ask you one question. Can you tell me anything about your vicar, the Rev. Gordon Maseley?"

"What, old Maseley?" the other exclaimed in some surprise. "He's all right. Bit bookish for a country parson, but he's really one of the best when you get to know him."

Daniel felt the shadow of disappointment resting once more upon him. Nevertheless he persisted.

"How long has he been here?" he enquired.

"Somewhere about fifteen years, I think. Maybe, longer. I can scarcely remember the place without him."

"Any family?"

"One daughter, Violet. A very charming young woman. Why this curiosity about the old boy? I shouldn't think there could be a more harmless person breathing, and I'll swear he hasn't a secret in the world. He's scarcely left the place for ten years."

"Would he be likely to be interested in works on lunacy?"

"He's interested in any stuffy old book, on any abstruse question," Gerald Oakes declared. "He is one of the real old-fashioned sort, never been out of England and wouldn't send Violet any further than Cheltenham for boarding-school."

Daniel rose to his feet and held out his hand.

"I came down on a chance," he explained. "I see that I was on a false trail. I shan't worry you with any more questions."

The young man bade them both a courteous but rather tired farewell.

"My respects to Sir Francis," he said. "Tell him, if he wants to know any particulars, that I strolled out as usual at five o'clock to shoot a few rabbits, shot one in the little spinney beyond the park—he knows it—and a moment later seemed to feel everything around me become grey, and afterwards black. And that's all there is to be said."

"One moment," Daniel begged. "You differen-

tiate between twilight and the blackness of total forgetfulness."

The young man nodded. There was some slight interest in his manner.

"Some day," he confided, "I believe I shall remember those first few seconds."

"Was there a woman connected with them?" Daniel ventured.

"I believe there was, but I can't remember her," the young man confessed.

"Anything like Miss Violet Maseley?"

"Not a scrap! Please excuse me now, Mr. Rocke."

Daniel and Ann drove off in silence.

"So that's that," Ann sighed.

"The Rev. Gordon Maseley seems to be a myth," Daniel admitted. "A man who has lived here for fifteen years and apparently never left the place—well, it knocks our theory on the head."

Near the lodge gates they met an elderly lady who was walking towards the house. She stopped the car somewhat imperiously, by holding out her hand. She was obviously Mrs. Oakes.

"This is Doctor Osborn, I am sure," she said. "You have been up to see my son, haven't you?"

Daniel shook his head.

"I have been to see your son," he acknowledged, "and I am very glad indeed to find him so little the worse for his adventure. I brought him a letter from Sir Francis Worton."

"Really!" she exclaimed. "Sir Francis is a very old friend of ours. I am sorry I stopped you. You

see, we were expecting a physician this afternoon, and I took it for granted that you must be he."

"I am very glad to have had an opportunity of seeing your son," Daniel remarked. "His case is a very interesting one."

Mrs. Oakes looked at him curiously.

"If you are a friend of Sir Francis'," she said, "I suppose you are by way of being a detective—or isn't it 'investigator' you call it nowadays? Have you made any discoveries?"

"None whatever," Daniel confessed. "We had just a faint hope that we might have been able to shed some light upon the mystery, but I am afraid that has failed us. May I ask you one question?"

"Certainly."

"Are there any newcomers in the neighbourhood —people of whose antecedents you know nothing, or in whom you might possibly be deceived?"

"Not a soul," was the prompt reply. "With the exception of Mr. Lord and his wife, who are perfectly charming, I have known every one in this neighbourhood for twenty years."

"Mr. Lord and his wife," Daniel repeated quickly. "Who are they?"

"The Rev. Mr. Lord is the locum tenens for Mr. Gordon Maseley, who has been away for a month," Mrs. Oakes explained. "I have just been to see them off at the station. Very helpful indeed, Mr. Lord has been. I don't know how I should have borne up without him."

Daniel felt Ann's clutch at his arm. He sat quite still in the car. The wind was booming across the

open spaces in the park, a spatter of rain was falling through the leaves of the trees. The place seemed suddenly unreal—to have an atmosphere of its own—the truth to roar in his ears. Londe had ordered the books in the name of the Rev. Gordon Maseley. Why not? And Gerald Oakes had forgotten.

"You said that you had been to see them off?" Daniel asked, as soon as he could control his voice. "Do you know where they went to?"

"London," Mrs. Oakes replied. "They caught the train at the junction. I understand that they have a small flat in Harley House. I am going to see them next month when I am in town."

Daniel's adieux were a little abruptly made. He called in the village to send off a telegram, and at the inn to collect his luggage. At the latter place the landlady handed him a note.

"This was left for you, sir, by the gentleman who has been doing duty for Mr. Maseley," she explained. "He left it here on his way to the station."

Daniel tore open the envelope.

My dear enemy,

You really lead me a very restless life. It is, I suppose, this odious Press. A mysterious disappearance would, naturally, set that mighty brain of yours to work. What a pity, though, that you always wait until you see something interesting in the newspapers. The young man will be quite all right in time, and I am proud of the success of my experiment. I have another one to make before long, which I think will interest you still more. If that succeeds my long quest will be over.

My respects to Gerald Oakes. He is a nice lad, but he shouldn't kiss another man's wife.

Au revoir,

Joseph Londe.

P.S.—I shall leave South Fawley by the five-ten train, and you will, of course, have the usual posse of police and detectives at Waterloo. You are a dear, simple person, but just a trifle obvious, I think.

Daniel handed the note to his companion. He was a little white about the mouth. The strain of many disappointments was beginning to tell upon him. Ann slipped her arm through his.

"Daniel," she pointed out, "don't you realise this —that if he ever reaches his goal, or thinks he has, and recovers his reason, it will be the end of him. He will either commit suicide or give himself up to the police. If he ever does become sane there is a punishment waiting for him greater than any we can inflict."

They heard the train go screaming over the viaduct, miles away. Daniel looked after it, at first gloomily, then almost ferociously.

"If I had the strength of Samson," he muttered, "I would sacrifice the lives of every human being in that train, as Samson did the crowd in the Temple. I would pull down the standards of the viaduct and send it hurtling into space. I would watch a hundred people die, Ann, to be sure of that one man."

"I wouldn't," she answered simply. "I have more reason to hate him than you, and I am content to wait. I can see the signs coming already. Before very

long he will be only too anxious to pull down the standards himself. When he begins to feel like that, of what account is our vengeance?"

Daniel said nothing, but the hungry light in his eyes was undimmed.

VII

THE AVENUE OF DEATH

LONDE threw the copy of the *Times* which he had been reading across to his wife, and stood upon the hearthrug of the somewhat Victorian-looking drawing-room, scowling. They had settled down for a few months in a remote corner of Surrey.

"Read that, Judith," he invited.

She stretched out a lazy hand, drew the paper towards her, and read the paragraph aloud.

"£1,000 reward will be paid for any information as to the present whereabouts of Sir Josph Londe, Bart., late of Melbourne, Australia, Surgeon-Major in His Majesty's Forces. Apply Box 117, Offices of this Journal."

Judith looked up and laughed with the pleased interest of a child.

"Why, that must mean you, Joseph," she exclaimed. "Somebody seems to want you very badly."

He glanced at her with an evil light in his brilliant eyes—eyes which seemed during the last few months to have narrowed and to have receded in his head.

"Somebody wants me," he repeated bitterly. "I know who it is, of course. It is that arch-lunatic in

this world of lunatics, Daniel Rocke. I know what he wants, too. He wants to hang me."

"How ridiculous!" she murmured. "Are people ever hanged nowadays?"

"You have not much intelligence, Judith," he went on, dropping his voice a little, although they were alone in the room; "but you know what has happened, of course—the war has sent every living human creature mad. I could see it coming. I foretold it in the *Lancet* and all the medical papers. I even warned them in an article I sent to the *Fortnightly,* which they never published. I felt it coming like the end of the world. It is a horrible thing, Judith, to be the only sane person amongst all the hundreds of millions in the universe."

"What about me?" she asked, with an empty laugh.

"You are mad, of course," he answered scornfully, "but that does not matter. You are beautiful and that's all that counts with you. It is your very insanity which keeps your skin as soft as a baby's, your forehead unwrinkled, which gives you the strength never to tire. But think of the horror of the situation for me. I have the brain of a million scientists in one. I am solving every day in my mind problems which have baffled the world for generations, and yet, at any moment, I am liable to be arrested by lunatic detectives, tried by a lunatic judge and twelve lunatic jurymen, and hanged by a lunatic hangman. All this because I am the only sane person in the world!"

She smiled reassuringly. She was lying on a couch by the window, her hands clasped behind her head.

"Don't think of it, dear," she begged. "You are too clever, far too clever for them. Think how they try to catch us sometimes and how we always move on when we choose. A world of lunatics have no chance against a sane man like you."

He nodded, assentingly, but still with gloom.

"That is true," he admitted, "but mad people are sometimes very cunning. Not mad people like you," he continued, after a moment's pause. "You are just silly—soft, the country folk call it. But a man like Griggs! I have been watching Griggs lately. I have come to the conclusion that he is no longer trustworthy."

"What a pity!" she murmured. "He has been so useful and we must have somebody."

"I am afraid," Londe observed, with a peculiar smile, "that his days of utility are over. I have made a most interesting experiment upon him. I was obliged to do it as a matter of self-preservation, but I am afraid it means that he will be of little use to us in the future."

"Poor Griggs!" she sighed. "What have you done?"

"I have closed up the other cells in his mind," Londe confided. "He is now not only mad, but a hopeless imbecile. It was quite an interesting experiment."

She clapped her hands.

"What fun!" she exclaimed. "I must see him at once."

"You will be very interested," Londe assured her. "I flatter myself that there is no one living who could have done with that man what I have done."

He rang the bell and waited. A curious expression of vanity stole into his face. Griggs, pale-faced, stout, of unpleasant appearance, stumbled in. He was carrying a small bunch of flowers—dejected-looking buttercups and daisies.

"Thou didst ring, my liege," he bawled. "Thy wish! Quick, thy wish?"

"What are you doing with those rubbishy flowers?" his master demanded.

"Rubbishy! Why, they are carnations fair, for Phyllis Dare," the fat man warbled. "As a matter of fact," he went on confidentially, "Harry Tate and Marie Lloyd are lunching with me in the kitchen to meet the mother-in-law of the President of the United States—dear old lady, but just a little"—he tapped his forehead understandingly. "Flowers always soothe her."

Londe had adopted, and was practising to perfection, the attitude of the understanding and humouring visitor to the insane. He smiled pleasantly.

"And what are you giving them for lunch, Griggs?" he enquired. "You must feed such distinguished company well."

"Sire," was the confident reply, "all is arranged. I have ransacked the cellars of the Café Royal and the larders of monarchs. I have tripe from the private store of the King of the Pearlies for the mother-in-law of the President, a peacock from the garden of the Emperor of China for Marie Lloyd, and steak from the carcass of the pet alligator of the Sun God for Harry Tate. The grub's all right."

"Capital," Londe murmured. "And the wine?"

"Golden Tokay for all, from the cellars of the Lord Mayor of all the Hungaries, with a gallon of half and half for Harry Tate straight from the Golden Lion," was the boastful announcement. "The booze is tip-top."

"You had better go and attend to your guests now," Londe enjoined kindly. "Present my compliments and best wishes to all."

"Aye, aye, my master mariner!" Griggs acquiesced with one hand behind his back and making a strenuous attempt at the first steps of the hornpipe. "I do thy bidding, my liege."

He departed, closing the door behind him. Londe looked vaingloriously towards his wife. His expression of self-satisfaction interfered curiously with the normal strength of his face.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he demanded. "The result of barely an hour's treatment."

Judith laughed immoderately, laughed till the tears stood in her eyes. Londe waited patiently for her verdict. When it came it surprised him.

"And you call me soft!" she exclaimed, mockingly. "You call me silly! You think I have no brain!"

"What do you mean?" he asked suspiciously.

"Mean! Why, a special ward case could tell that Griggs isn't mad at all," she declared. "He was shamming all the time. He picked up that stuff in the asylum where he used to look after us. I heard it often myself."

She went off again into peals of laughter. Londe, for a moment, seemed stupefied. Then his face darkened. His expression became murderous.

"If I believed that!" he muttered.

"Pooh!" she scoffed. "I may be soft and silly, but even I could see that he was acting. Follow him downstairs in a few minutes, Joseph, and listen to him talking to Mrs. Griggs. Follow him silently. You know how to do it."

"I will," he assented.

Griggs, on his return to the kitchen, seated himself at the table and resumed the letter from which his master's bell had summoned him. Mrs. Griggs put her head in from the scullery. Her change of occupation from wardress of an asylum to housekeeper had not softened the harsh outlines of her face.

"Well?" she asked. "Is it going all right?"

"All right with the old josser, anyhow," her husband replied. "He listens all the time as proud as a parent with his new-born child, chuckling away to himself like anything. He's like that visiting superintendent, old Robinson, they had down at Chigwell. Worst of it is, I've about worked off all the old stuff I can remember on him."

"And what about Madam?" Mrs. Griggs enquired. "I'm thinking sometimes she's not such a softy as she seems."

Her husband's air of self-satisfaction was momentarily clouded.

"Hanged if I can quite size up Madam," he confessed. "She watches and listens all the time with that baby smile on her face, but I've seen her laughing to herself sometimes, just as though she understood. Anyhow, the old man is sopping it up. That's all that matters."

His better half departed and Griggs settled down to his letter. He read it over as far as he had gone:

Honoured sir,

Replying to your ad. in the *Times,* I can put you on to Londe and shall be glad to handle the thousand quid.

I know all about him, for I was his warder in Chigwell Asylum and I am now in his service, also my wife. I was with him at the house in Salisbury Plain and helped him to trick the cops. If I give you the office now——

The pen seemed suddenly to become wax in his fingers and a great fear went through him, like the shiver of death: He had heard no footsteps, yet he knew that he was not alone. Some one was standing behind his chair. He made an effort. Useless! There was a quick hissing sound, a faint cloud of vapour—no more than a whiff of cigarette smoke—and the strength went from his limbs like the last gasp from an empty soda-water syphon. Londe stook back and looked at him.

"What a fool you are, Griggs!" he said scornfully.

The man had no strength, mental or physical, to reply. Londe called for his wife.

"Mrs. Griggs," he enquired, as she came in, startled, from the other room. "Do you know anything of this letter?"

"Nothing, so help me God!" the woman declared piteously.

Londe tore it into small pieces. He pointed to

Griggs, stricken in his chair, colourless, gasping, with wide-open terrified eyes.

"Look at him, and remember," he enjoined. "I could do the same to you if I were a thousand miles off. I could reach you if you travelled round the world. You know that. You have never known me fail."

The woman disappeared, muttering. Londe smiled. He turned back to his quondam butler.

"You feel as though you were going to die," he observed, "but you are not—not, at any rate, until I say the word. Nasty sensation, though, isn't it, to feel your heart slipping through your boots?"

"Give me something," the man groaned. "I am dying."

Londe felt his pulse.

"Nerves," he pronounced calmly. "Now, pull yourself together. You have a letter to write for me."

Daniel Rocke passed the letter across to Ann.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

She read it carefully:

Honoured sir,

Seeing your advertisement in the *Times,* I can put you in touch with Joseph Londe, as I am now living in the same house with him. I know him well as I was a warder in Chigwell Asylum, and he was there. My wife and I have been cook and butler to him most of the time since.

My terms would be a thousand pounds down and no questions asked about me and my wife helping in

the escape from the house in Salisbury Plain. If agreeable to you, motor slowly along the road between Cobham and Ripley, near four o'clock, tomorrow, with a white handkerchief tied to the right-hand door of the car. Come alone or you will see nothing of

John Griggs.

The light flamed in Ann's eyes, her lips trembled, her wonderful air of self-possession seemed gone.

"Is there any reason why this shouldn't be genuine?" she asked.

"No, I don't know that there is," Daniel admitted. "It sounds all right. From what I can remember of the man Griggs, I should think he would sell his soul for a thousand pounds."

"If this were only the end," she murmured passionately. "Shall we go down in the Crossley?"

"We?"

"Naturally. You know why I am here. It was always understood that we hunted Joseph Londe together."

"That's all very well," Daniel replied, "and I haven't left you out of it much, have I? But this is a different affair. The man we are hunting may be a lunatic, but it is foolish to forget for a moment that he is as cunning as any sane man could be. Remember he has probably seen this advertisement as well as Griggs. The letter may be a trap."

She laughed at him.

"Well, I suppose you'll take a few reasonable precautions," she observed. "You'll have to tell

Sir Francis about it, and he will come along behind."

"Nice idiots we should look, motoring along the roads with a white handkerchief tied to the handle of our door," Daniel grumbled.

"People will think we have just been married," she observed demurely.

"If we had, I shouldn't mind so much," he declared, with unwonted gallantry. "Anyhow, I'm not going to take you."

"I can bicycle," she pointed out defiantly.

"You will be needed here to look after the office."

"The office can look after itself for one afternoon," she persisted. "Besides, the place only exists, so far as I am concerned, as the headquarters from which to hunt this man. It is no good, Mr. Rocke, I am not going to sit here and wait whilst you are after Londe."

"I don't know that to-morrow is going to bring us in touch with him at all," he reminded her. "All that this man promises is information as to his whereabouts."

"I am not running any risk of being left out, anyhow," she assured him, with a final note of defiance in her tone.

So she went, as Daniel always knew that she would, notwithstanding his remonstrances, and it was not until they had passed through Cobham and had commenced to crawl that he was conscious of any real uneasiness. Even then he felt that it was scarcely reasonable. Close behind, although kept carefully out of sight, was a police car, containing Sir Francis, Windergate, and two highly qualified subordinates. His own automatic was close to his hand, and he had

made up his mind to shoot at the slightest signs of treachery. For himself, he felt nothing but a pleasurable thrill of excitement. He knew perfectly well that the nervousness at the back of his mind was wholly connected with the girl who sat by his side. Excitement became Ann well, except that her eyes were a little too pitilessly bright, her mouth drawn into a shade too straight a line. She was intensely alive—a human magnetic force. At that moment of crisis Daniel felt the rush of strange thoughts. He was suddenly convinced that his own attitude towards her had been unsympathetic and arbitrary. Sir Francis had never concealed his admiration. Windergate had gone even further. He, alone, had been content to remain the employer, the grumpy, middle-aged man. The only tie between them had been one of a common fierce desire to hunt down this man. Now they were passing into danger, and he began to see certain things in life with singular and disconcerting clearness. Ann, on the other hand, was entirely absorbed in their immediate object. She was leaning a little forward, her eyes searching the country.

"We ought to be seeing something of Mr. Griggs shortly," Daniel remarked.

She turned her head to look at him. His tone was unusual. Then she looked once more along the level stretch of road and pointed. A very old Ford car was drawn up by the side of the path. The bonnet was open and a man was apparently examining the engine.

"What about that?" she asked.

He slackened speed.

"You are not afraid?" he whispered.

"I am afraid of nothing on earth," she answered, "except that Londe may die before we catch him."

"You are a brave girl," he declared.

"I loved my father," she said simply. "The thought of a fiend like that man going about free, and plotting more crimes, is like a nightmare to me. Look," she went on. "It's the man who took Londe's place on Salisbury Plain. That's Griggs."

The man who had been bending over the bonnet of his car stood up as they drew slowly near. He was almost unrecognisable, pallid, shrunken, and with a strange expression of fear in his bully's face. He was unkempt, unshaven, an exceedingly unconvincing conspirator. Yet, without a doubt, it was Griggs.

Daniel brought the car to a standstill. Griggs took a step forward and caught hold of the wind screen. He seemed in need of support.

"Have you brought the money, master?" he demanded.

Daniel nodded.

"I have it in my pocket," he said. "It is yours as soon as we can arrest Londe."

"And no questions asked?"

"No questions asked."

Griggs looked doubtfully behind, along the road.

"How many men have you got following?" he asked.

"Three who are used to rough work," Daniel told him, "besides Sir Francis and myself."

"He's a devil," Griggs muttered. "He's Satan himself. That's who he is! You'll never be sure of him until the handcuffs are upon his wrists."

"Bring us to him," Daniel demanded. "That's all we ask of you. We may not wait for the handcuffs."

Griggs wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"I'll be glad when it's over," he groaned, watching the other car slowly approaching. "I wish to God I'd never set eyes on him. You both follow me," he went on after a moment's miserable pause. "About a mile along the road I shall turn to the left. After that, in another mile, to the right. You will see a drive a few yards along with the gates open, most likely. The house is about another hundred yards back, and he's in it. As soon as you get within sight push along for the front door at top speed. He's doing some experiments this morning."

"Don't you turn in there too?" Daniel asked.

Griggs was closing the bonnet of his own car. He looked up a moment later.

"No, I go on to the back of the house," he explained. "There's another drive leading to the kitchen quarters, and I've got all my groceries to leave. The governor's room looks out that way. You go up to the front, and you can be in the house before he hears a thing. The front door's always open, and I've hidden the key. Rush the drive, mind."

He lumbered off, and Daniel reported to Sir Francis. The two cars followed the Ford at a reasonable distance. Soon they turned off the main road and a little later once again to the right. They were on a by-road now which seemed to lead to nowhere.

"There's the house all right," Daniel muttered,

pointing through the trees. "The lodge gates must be just round the bend."

Ann leaned forward.

"Look out," she warned him, extending her hand to the following car, "the Ford has stopped."

Daniel jammed on his brakes. The two cars crawled round the corner, and pulled up behind the Ford. Griggs had descended and was leaning against a gate—his forehead wet, his eyes bloodshot, his colour ghastly. He was like a man facing some ugly death and discovering himself to be a coward.

"I can't do it, governor," he moaned to Daniel. "I'm no b——y saint, but I can't do it. I'm on the double cross. Do you get me?"

"I understand," Daniel said. "Go on."

"Don't you turn in at those gates," the man urged, his voice choked and barely coherent, "not you or the other car. I'm telling you, mind. Leave the cars here in the road and take the footpath through the shrubbery. You'll get to the house almost as quick. And leave the young lady behind. I wish to God I'd never seen him."

Griggs climbed back into his car clumsily, with all the semblance of a drunken man. He was, without a doubt, in a state of mortal terror.

"Why do you want us to leave the cars here?" Daniel demanded suspiciously. "A few minutes ago you urged us to rush for the house."

"For God's sake don't ask me no questions," the man groaned. "I was on the double cross. I'm straight now, so help me. Keep the young lady out of it."

He started off in the Ford, escaping the ditch only by a few inches. They had all dismounted now and were standing in the road.

"Come on then, we'll try the footpath," Daniel decided. "It will only take a moment or two longer. Miss Lancaster, you come last, please."

Windergate, who had been driving the police car, sprang back into his place.

"I'm taking no chances," he declared grimly. "That chap may have turned round again. I believe he wants an opportunity to warn Londe. You fellows come on through the shrubbery. I'll make a rush for it. We can't both be wrong that way."

Daniel opened his lips to protest, but closed them again. After all, Windergate's point of view was reasonable. It was clear that Griggs was almost hysterical with fear. And it was quite plausible that his old dread of Londe should have broken out again. Besides, Windergate was a powerful man and a deadly shot—even alone more than a match for Londe. So the car swept by them and Daniel made for the shrubbery footpath. A queer afternoon stillness seemed to reign everywhere—an ominous and unwholesome silence. Daniel—perhaps every one of them—seemed to sense some coming danger. The car ahead had turned the last bend, they themselves were not far behind, when it was upon them. A deafening roar seemed to split and tear the air. The ground shook beneath their feet. Daniel, who was leading, threw up his hands and staggered, seemed to feel the earth rise up and hit his chin, and doubled over like a shot rabbit. The others, who were behind, saw things which

he missed—uprooted trees in the air, a cloud of dust, a shower of small pebbles which came down through the trees like hailstones, and a strange white light, come and gone in a moment, but which made the sunny afternoon seem for a second or two afterwards as though it were wrapped in the mantle of twilight.

Daniel was up again, on his feet, almost as the others reached him, dazed but unhurt, save for a cut on the forehead. No one spoke. They all raced forward. Daniel was the first round the bend. He turned, holding up both his hands, and shouted to Worton.

"Don't let Miss Lancaster come. For God's sake, keep her back."

Ann easily evaded Worton's outstretched arm. She was speechless but determined. Together they saw what had happened; the car, a twisted, unrecognisable heap of metal, Windergate more terribly dealt with—his clothing alone could have identified him—a great hole in the road, in which a dozen men could have been buried, a twisted wire, a faint, unpleasant smell. Then, after a glance, they seemed to dismiss the whole matter as unimportant. With one accord, they set their faces towards that rather bare, white stone house, with its silent windows. A fury was in the blood of all of them. Daniel, with the habit of his 'Varsity running days back again in his limbs, headed the line, and he carried in his hand, without concealment, his very ugly automatic pistol. There was no doubt in his mind as to what he was going to do. He was going to shoot Londe on sight.—They reached the house. No need to ring. Griggs had kept his word so far that the front door stood wide open. There was a white stone, al-

most circular hall, only partially covered with one shabby mat. In the centre of it a man lay flat on his back, his arms outstretched, stone dead, with a small bullet hole in his forehead.

Daniel, glancing nervously around, threw a handkerchief over his face.

"Griggs!" he muttered. "That must have been quick work. Londe was here, then, not many seconds ago. Come on."

They searched the silent house from attic to basement, and no band of Western lynchers were ever so full of murder in their hearts as those four men with their guns gripped in their hands. Not a word was spoken, not one of them had any other thought but to kill. As the moments passed, a silent despairing fury seized them all. There were everywhere signs of very recent occupation, but nowhere the sound or presence of any human being. The Ford was in the back yard with its engine still throbbing. There was a dying fire in the kitchen, but no one to tend it; food in the larder, but no one to cook it. Upstairs, one bed had been slept in, and there were clothes—a man's in one room, and a woman's, all perfume and silk and crêpe de chine, in another. But the clothes were all that remained. Once more Londe seemed to have stepped off the side of the earth.

VIII

MADMEN'S LUCK

A YOUNG man, newly arrived in Monte Carlo, strolled along the arcade towards Ciro's Restaurant about half-past twelve on a brilliant February morning, with the intention of ordering a table for lunch. He had scarcely exchanged greetings with the *maître d'hôtel* when he stopped short and gazed eagerly at the occupants of a distant and retired table.

"Tell me," he enquired, "do you know the name of the man and woman sitting over there?"

The waiter glanced discreetly in the direction indicated.

"I do not know their names, sir," he admitted, "but they are very good patrons. They come early to lunch most days and always choose an inconspicuous table."

Something in the woman's expression at that moment appealed to the young man's sense of memory. He crossed the room towards the two and approached them with a confident smile.

"Doctor Londe, isn't it—I beg your pardon, Sir Joseph Londe, and Sister Judith? I should have known you anywhere, sir; but I was not so sure about Sister," he added, with an admiring glance at the very beautiful and perfectly gowned woman.

The man who had been accosted by the name of

Londe looked steadily at the newcomer. The woman was smiling at him, but it was not a smile of recognition.

"You are mistaken, sir," the former declared. "My name is not Londe, I am not a doctor, and I do not know you."

The young man seemed dumfounded. He stared at the two in a bewildered fashion..

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir," he stammered. "I may have been mistaken about the lady, though I didn't think that possible; but you, sir,—you took my leg off, back of Ypres, in '16, a marvellous piece of surgery, every one said. Brookes, my name is—Ernest Brookes. I was a Second Lieutenant in the Sherwood Foresters then."

"All I can say, Mr. Brookes, is that you are mistaken," was the unequivocal response. "My name is Gray. I am not a doctor, and I was never at the war."

The young man made a somewhat clumsy and apologetic retreat, and took a table some distance away. What made his confusion worse was his consciousness of the fact that the lady was laughing at him in a childish but very engaging fashion. She was suddenly sober, however, when she caught the glint in her husband's eyes a few minutes later.

"How should you like," the latter asked cruelly, "to go back to Chigwell again for the rest of your life? You can remember the days there. Does the thought of them appeal to you?"

She shook with horror. The tears were in her eyes. She was like a beautiful passion flower, revelling in the sunshine of life, revelling in the silk which clung

to her limbs, the perfume still haunting her from her bath, the full sensuous joy of youth and beauty. The grey horror of his suggestion was like a stab—the coarse clothes and food, the ugliness, the sexlessness of it!

"Joseph, don't," she begged. "You are too clever ever to let that happen."

"If I am left to myself, yes," he snarled. "It was you who insisted upon coming here. You wanted to deck yourself out like a butterfly and flap your fine wings for men to see. I was a fool to give in."

"What about the gambling?" she asked, with a slow smile. "You were short of money, you said. Who was it discovered that you must win?"

He nodded sombrely.

"Fools have luck. The mad make a certainty of it," he muttered. "You certainly stumbled upon that truth. You should play yourself, Judith. You are worse than I am. The gap in your brain is bigger."

For a single moment, the sweet childishness of her expression vanished. There were evil things in her face—hatred, which flared to meet his. A revealing moment, carrying with it a long trail of reminiscence. It passed. She laughed lightly.

"You were wrong to have sent the young man away," she remarked. "You might have dealt with him more safely."

They wandered to the Sporting Club later, to all appearance a normal couple, a harmless, stalwart, middle-aged husband, with a beautiful young wife. Women envied her clothes, and her manner of wearing them.

Men asked for her smiles. She was subtly aware of both and insidiously responsive to the latter.

"I am going to play high," Londe told her. "It may be our last chance."

She sighed.

"It will break my heart to go," she declared.

"We should never have come," he rejoined. "A totally sane person of normal intelligence, like Daniel Rocke, is usually easy enough to outwit, but once in ten times he may blunder his way to success. I am uneasy since that young man recognised me."

He played for half an hour on the even chances in maximums. Gradually his pile grew. When he became conspicuous he changed his table. He had no fancy for the limelight in which the large winner sits. Suddenly he altered his tactics. He thrust some mille notes towards the croupier.

"*Quatorze en plein, les carrés et chevaux, transversal treize-dix-huit, maximum,*" he whispered.

"*Parfaitement, monsieur,*" the man replied, throwing the counters on the table and arranging them with his rake. "*Quatorze, les carrés et les chevaux, et transversal treize-dix-huit, pour le maximum.*"

The wheel spun on to its destiny, the hand that guided it beyond the comprehension of any man. The warning cry of "*Rien ne va plus*" preceded the click of the falling ball by only a few seconds.

"*Quatorze, rouge et pair,*" the croupier's monotonous voice announced. There was a little murmur. The business of paying commenced. Londe's winnings seemed fabulous. He asked for *mille* notes and stuffed them away in his pocket. His stake he left on the table.

The wheel spun again.

"*Treize, noir et impair,*" the croupier announced.

"*Deux carrés, et un cheval pour moi,*" Londe murmured, "*aussi le transversal de treize-dix-huit.*"

"*C'est ça, monsieur,*" the man assented, counting out a further huge pile of bills.

"*Encore quatorze en plein, les carrés et chevaux, le transversal de treize-dix-huit pour le maximum,*" Londe directed.

The stake was made. This time a murmur of positive excitement ran through the crowd as the croupier announced the winning number.

"*Quatorze, rouge et pair!*"

Londe collected his winnings, dropped a *mille* note in the *boite* and strolled away. In a corner of the bar he found Judith. For a single moment his lips closed tight and there was a glitter in his eyes. She was seated side by side with the young man who had accosted them in Ciro's, to all appearance engaged in confidential conversation. The young man's admiration was perhaps a little too openly displayed, and nothing in his companion's attitude indicated rebuke. Londe crossed the room towards them. Judith looked up at him with a lazy smile.

"I have been telling Mr. Brookes that you would like to speak to him," she remarked. "How opulent you seem. Are those *mille* notes with which your pockets are stuffed, and if so can I have the ermine wrap?"

"I have been winning," he answered shortly. "Get the ermine wrap if you want it. I will wait here."

He handed her a packet of notes. She sprang up

with the eager cry of a child. Her cheeks were already flushed with anticipation.

"You dear thing!" she exclaimed. "Joseph, you are adorable. Wait for me here. I shan't be half an hour."

She forgot to say good-bye to the young man. He seemed suddenly to have lost all interest for her. She moved across the room, divinely graceful, a happy, beautiful young woman, without a care in the world. There was scarcely a person who did not look at her with admiration. Brookes seemed almost stupefied. He gazed after her until she had passed out of sight.

"Sister Judith!" he muttered. "Impossible!"

"Nevertheless, true," Londe observed calmly. "I desire to offer you my apologies. I *am* Sir Joseph Londe, and it was I who operated on you in the Field Hospital behind Ypres."

"I was sure of it," the young man declared. "But why——"

"Stop!" Londe interrupted. "I desire to ask you a question. Have you mentioned meeting me to a soul in Monte Carlo?"

"I haven't spoken to a soul here," was the earnest reply, "except you and your wife. I don't know any one."

"Good!" Londe exclaimed. "I have reasons for wishing to preserve my incognito. That is why I denied myself to you at Ciro's."

"Sir," Brookes said firmly, "I am not likely to forgot that you saved my life. You have only to hint at a request and it is granted. I shall not mention to

a soul in the world either that I have seen you here or that I know who you are."

"Under those conditions," Londe assured him, "my wife and I—you realise, of course, that I married Sister Judith—will be happy to renew our acquaintance with you.—Let me ask you this, by the by. How did it happen that you recognised me? I have certainly changed a good deal since those days."

"By a miracle," the young man replied. "Sister Judith—I beg your pardon, Lady Londe—was leaning forward, asking you a question and you were frowning a little. It was just a familiar trick of attitude, and the voice. When you denied it, I came to the conclusion that I must have made a mistake. If I may say so, sir, your wife seems to have grown so much younger and so marvellously beautiful."

"She will be flattered to hear your opinion," Londe remarked, with faint sarcasm, "that is, if you have not already confided it to her.—If my memory serves me right, you were not in the regular army," he went on.

Brooks shook his head.

"I am a tea and rubber planter in a small way, sir," he announced. "I came home to join up and I've been back in Ceylon two years. I got off the P. & O. boat at Marseilles to take a fortnight of my holiday here—the first since the war."

"Then you have no friends in the place?" Londe persisted.

"I haven't come across a soul I know yet," the young man answered, a little disconsolately.

"You will dine with us, I trust, to-night," Londe

invited. "We have a small villa at Cap Martin. A carriage will take you there in a very short time. The Villa Violette, at nine o'clock, if that hour is agreeable. My wife likes to remain here until eight."

"I shall be delighted," was the enthusiastic assent.

Londe wandered off, left the place and strolled across to the Casino. A fit of restlessness, a black fit, was upon him. The sight of this former patient of his had brought back a cloud of memories. He turned abruptly away and stood upon the Terrace—deserted at that hour of a grey afternoon—looking seaward. The old panorama of horror, of blood and misery, rolled itself out before him. He heard the shrieks of the wounded, the hoarse cries of the stretcher bearers, the grim background of booming guns, and the snapping volleys of machine-gun fire. On came the stretchers—an endless, ghastly stream. Here, a bearer vomited and collapsed, there, a nurse fainted. He, alone, stood immovable, stern, with the kindness of infinite skill, enduring beyond the belief of man. Once the earth rolled up beneath his feet, but the shrieking of the wounded soldier whom two sobbing bearers had laid before him, brought the strength back to his arm. On that particular man, he performed a miracle.—Day and night were the same, save that the night was a little more awful in its mystery. That little amphitheater was the altar upon which he had sacrificed the vital part of his life! He leaned over the wall and gazed seawards. Something had gone wrong with him somewhere. A link between body and soul had snapped. It was a great price.

A storm of rain drove him into the Casino. He

wandered from table to table, collecting at each a little stack of plaques and notes, staying nowhere long enough to excite more than a passing comment, but almost invariably winning, always a solitary, brooding figure. At seven o'clock he returned to the Sporting Club. Contrary to her custom, Judith was playing, and there was already a great pile of plaques and bills in front of her. Brookes was seated on her left. A very meagre pile of counters represented his capital, and there was already a strained look about his face and a nervous glitter in his eyes. Londe smiled.

"Any luck?" he asked, as he leaned over and thrust a plaque on twenty-nine.

Brookes glanced up at him feverishly.

"Rotten!" he declared. "I have lost about all I brought with me."

He twitched his moustache nervously and pushed the remainder of his little pile on red. The croupier's monotonous voice broke the few seconds of tense silence which followed the click of the little ball as it sank into its chosen place.

"*Vingt-neuf, noir et impair.*"

Londe gathered in his winnings with imperturbable face. The young man sat quite still for several moments. He seemed to be staring into vacancy. Then he rose abruptly, and made his way towards the door. Londe glanced at his wife. She nodded almost imperceptibly, gathered up her winnings and followed him, floating down the room like a gorgeous butterfly with the perfume of the flowers upon which she had rested shaken from her clothes. She found Brookes seated alone in a corner of the bar.

"I have come to have a cocktail with you," she murmured.

He looked at her longingly. There was an expression partly of embarrassment, partly of despair, in his face.

"I'm afraid you'll have to pay for it then," he laughed harshly. "I've lost all I brought with me."

She smiled, and gave an order to the waiter.

"You're very foolish to bet against a run," she told him. "I shall give you a lecture to-night."

"To-night!" he sighed ruefully. "But how can I come? I haven't even enough money left to pay my carriage."

She slipped a *mille* note into his hand.

"I shall lend you this," she whispered, "because I like you, and because I will not be disappointed of your coming."

He gazed at her adoringly.

"How wonderful you are!" he exclaimed.

She suffered her hand to rest upon his for a moment.

"Here come our cocktails," she announced. "We will drink to our further acquaintance. So far as I remember, you were a very troublesome patient."

"I shall drink," he declared impressively, "to things of which I dare not speak."

She sat down her glass empty and rose to her feet.

"I must go back to my husband," she said. "To-night at nine o'clock."

It was, in its way, a wonderful dinner, served by a typical French butler, and cooked by his wife. Londe was an excellent host, Judith a seductive hostess. Brookes expanded with the wine and the glamour of

his surroundings. He told them both his story. After the war, he had gone back to Ceylon, to find his small estate in a parlous condition. Then the price of rubber, of which half his planting consisted, had fallen to nothing. In despair, after two years of unsuccessful toiling, he had closed down the estate, collected all the money he could, which amounted only to about nine hundred pounds, and come to England, for a holiday first and then to make a fresh start. That nine hundred pounds he had lost at the tables that afternoon. Judith was a little scornful. Londe only smiled. The young man drank more wine.

"I must make money somehow," he declared. "I can't think why I can't win at the tables like you do. Everything you back seems to turn up."

Londe's smile became more evident.

"There is a reason for that," he remarked.

"What do you mena?" Brookes demanded eagerly. "Do you play on a system?"

Londe shook his head. Judith laughed.

"We need no system," the former confided. "We win always because neither my wife nor I are perfectly sane. A mad person, as you know, will win at any game of chance."

"I beg your pardon," the young man ventured, a little bewildered.

"I mean exactly what I said," Londe continued, with dignity. "You, yourself, know something of our activities during the war. We did twice as much work as any other surgeon and nurse. In the end, a small portion of my brain became affected. My wife, curiously enough, developed sympathetic symptoms."

"God bless my soul!" the young man gasped.

"There is nothing so extraordinary in the matter," Londe proceeded stiffly. "A small spot in my brain became discoloured; it became, in fact, red instead of of ordinary grey, which, you may be aware, is the colour of a normal person's brain. An operation was indicated. All that I needed was a small atom of healthy matter to be annexed to mine, in a manner known only to me. Now, I'm going to tell you something that I have never told any other living person. I advertised for a subject. Shall I tell you the result?"

"Yes, yes, certainly."

"I was incarcerated in a lunatic aslyum—my wife and I—for over a year."

Brookes was past speech. He lifted his glass. He gazed at the speaker, half-fearfully, yet with a terrible curiosity.

"When they let me out," Londe continued, "I tried again to find a subject, only this time I knew better than to advertise. I investigated the brains of several persons who happened to come my way, but in each case I found a small red discolouration just in the same position as my own. For the present, therefore, I have abandoned the attempt. My efforts seem to have created an absurd prejudice against me on the part of the police and other troublesome people, and, to tell you the truth, I have lost faith, to some extent, in my own theory of exchange. Besides, my wife and I find a certain compensation in our present state."

"You really believe that you are both a little mad still, then?" Brookes faltered.

"Without a doubt," his host assented. "I am

perfectly aware that both my wife and I, in different and varying degrees, lack an absolutely sane poise towards life. But what does that matter? See!"

He rose to his feet, and drew on one side the blinds which concealed the window. From outside a stone balcony looked down upon gardens, glorious in the full moonlight, and sloping to the still Mediterranean. There were cypress trees, like black frescoes against the deep blue background, orange trees, bending with their load of fruit, a few olive trees, a grove of firs, a mass of flowering shrubs, oleanders, a bed of Freesias, whose disturbing perfume crept into the room. From below came the haunting sound of the soft lapping of the waves upon the shore.

"We can appreciate beauty," Londe pointed out, "just as you can. We have gifts—cunning, I suppose you would call the chief one—which enable us to match our wits against most people's. We have lost the rack of nerves—look at my wife, she is more beautiful and younger now than during or before the war. All that we lack, the scientists would say, is soul—and who on earth is not the better for being without a soul?"

Londe dropped the curtain and turned back into the room. His wife's hand rested on the young man's arm. He felt the pressure of her fingers, and his brain reeled with the wonder of it. He was, after all, quite an ordinary person.

"I shall go to my *salon*," she murmured, moving towards the door. "Please come soon."

Brookes resumed his place at the table and sipped the old brandy which his host had produced. He was still in a state of feverish bewilderment. Londe, in

his way, seemed also excited. His eyes were bright, his lips tense.

"I have a proposition to make to you, Mr. Brookes," he announced. "Do you care to hear it?"

"Rather," the young man agreed, a little recklessly. "If there's any money at the end of it, it will be all the more welcome."

"There will be all the money you can use at the end of it," Londe promised. "Briefly, the situation is this. You know, of your own experience, that I am a great surgeon."

"I have heard it said that you are the greatest surgeon in the world," was the emphatic assent.

"It is possibly true," Londe acquiesced. "I am also a great scientist. I have invented a new anæsthetic, which has marvellous properties. I have a tube in my pocket now. I could take the strength from your limbs with a single whiff, whilst leaving your brain normal. Or I have another one, with which I could entirely reverse the process. Would you like me to experiment——?"

"No! For God's sake, no!" the young man interrupted.

Londe smiled tolerantly.

"Just as you like, of course. Now, I have made another discovery which I am anxious to try," he continued, leaning back in his chair, and lighting a cigarette. "I still believe that I shall be able some day to regain my sanity by my principle of brain transfusion, but my last discovery is this. I can make you insane like me. I could give you a draught to-night, and you would awake to-morrow, to all appearances, exactly

the same person, but you yourself would be conscious of the change. You would be lighter-hearted, gayer, happier, and, in some things—such as gambling, for instance—your success would be extraordinary. You would be free, too, from the thraldom of soul."

"But I should be mad," the young man muttered.

Londe shrugged his shoulders.

"Are you so happy, as you are, and is your future so assured?" he asked. "Give yourself over to me for experiment, and to-morrow you can make a million francs at the tables, and a million more whenever you choose."

Brookes looked around him, dazed but already shaking with excitement.

"This isn't some sort of an Arabian Nights, is it?" he asked, with a clumsy laugh.

"I am making a perfectly practical proposition to you," his host assured him.

"What do I have to do about it?"

"You submit to a slight injection before you leave this house," Londe explained, "and you take a draught which I shall prepare for you."

The young man rose from his seat and walked to the window. His heart was pounding. Somehow or other, although he had affected incredulity, he felt a curious conviction that this amazing offer was a perfectly genuine one. Suddenly he swung round.

"I consent," he announced. "I might as well. There is nothing else left for me."

Londe accepted his decision as a matter of course.

"I shall now go to prepare the drug," he declared. "It takes careful mixing. When you have offered

yourself for my experiment, I shall give you ten of these *mille* notes to start with. Afterwards, your future is in your own hands. Do me the favour to entertain my wife for a quarter of an hour. You will find her in the *salon* across the hall."

The young man, in a state now of fierce excitement, hastened to obey his host. He was an unambitious youth, who, save for that brief period of the war, had lived, for the most part, a quiet life in middle-class surroundings. He had certainly never been brought into social contact with any woman so lovely and engaging as Judith. Her very presence intoxicated him. He felt himself trembling as he heard his host's retreating footsteps, and he himself turned the handle of the door of the *salon*. Judith was half sitting, half reclining, upon the sofa as he entered. The flash of her white arm, as she motioned him to a seat by her side, maddened him. She wore a wonderful, blue brocaded gown, fastened round her waist by a silken girdle, seductively unrestraining. She saw his confusion and laughed at him. He leaned towards her, but she held him away.

"Silly boy," she murmured. "You lose your head so easily, and now you have lost all your money."

"I shall make more, a great deal more," he declared passionately. "Do you know that you are the most beautiful thing on earth?"

"Foolish!" she mocked. "There, you may hold my hand. I like you very much, but——"

"I love you," he broke in. "I adore you, Judith. Come back to Ceylon with me."

She laughed outright.

"And what about my husband?" she asked. "And what should we live on? I am a very extravagant woman."

"I can make money," he assured her. "To win you I shall do it."

"I like you. I have affection to give," she told him; "but I warn you that I am a pagan. I will love you a little when you give me a present like this."

She held up her arm, from which drooped a strange bracelet, a thin band of platinum and a single rose-tinted pearl.

"I will do it," he promised. "One kiss, Judith, one kiss."

She leaned towards him, then suddenly drew back with a warning gesture. The door had opened noiselessly. Londe stood upon the threshold. His face was imperturbable. He appeared not to notice his guest's embarrassment. He simply stood there.

"I have a liqueur I am anxious for you to try, Mr. Brookes," he said. "Afterwards, perhaps my wife will give us some music."

The young man hesitated. For a single moment a queer divination of evil seemed to oppress him. A black gulf yawned at his feet—on the other side of it Londe, impenetrable, yet menacing. He had an impulse to fly from the house. Then he heard Judith's whisper, low and caressing, carrying with it the spice of promise.

"Go with him now, and return."

He moved towards the door, crossed the white stone-flagged hall, and followed his host into the dining room. An old dust-covered brandy bottle stood

upon the table and two Napoleon glasses. Londe served the liqueurs with meticulous care.

"Eighteen eighteen," he murmured. "Gold and sunshine. The best things in life."

Brookes drained the contents of his glass. He felt a delicious sense of fragrant warmth steal through his veins. The touch of the brandy upon his palate was like velvet. Londe drew another bottle from behind a bowl of roses, poured out a wineglassful into a fresh glass, and passed it over.

"Now I want you to try that," he invited.

His guest did not hesitate. He raised the glass to his lips and drained its contents. It was tasteless, yet somehow suggestive, of marvellous and unexpected potency. He saw Londe's face, sinister but triumphant, and then a hundred faces. A mist and a roar. Afterwards nothing.

The morning was full of surprises to Brookes. He woke with an unusual sense of buoyancy, to find himself in his hotel bedroom, the sound of his bath water running, and the valet moving about the room, laying out his clothes. He sat up in bed.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "How the devil did I get here?"

The man smiled a little knowingly.

"Monsieur is in his own room," he observed.

"But I don't remember coming home last night," Brookes confessed.

"Monsieur arrived home soon after one o'clock," the man confided. "He was accompanied by an older gentleman who had the kindness to give me a twenty-

franc note. Monsieur had, without doubt, been dining well," he added.

Brookes felt absolutely no more curiosity about the events of the night before. He sprang out of bed, whistling lightly to himself. From the moment he stepped into his bath he was conscious of a new light-heartedness which he seemed to accept as a matter of course. He shouted for his breakfast, which he devoured eagerly, dressed with interest, and strolled out afterwards on to the terrace, full of an exhilaration such as he had not experienced for years, a childlike delight in his surroundings which took no account of his recent despair. He talked to all his neighbours in the famous bar where he took his morning cocktail, and made several new acquaintances, strolled across to the Casino, played without anxiety, and with a new sense of certainty, and before lunch, which he shared with some of his new friends, had won a trifle over forty *milles*. Four o'clock found him at the Sporting Club, engaged in an eager search for Judith. He played for a short time with a curious loss of all sense of excitement, won a pocketful of plaques and notes, but left the tables directly Londe and Judith entered. He hurried to them with all the eagerness of a schoolboy. They both looked at him curiously.

"Winning?" Londe enquired.

Brookes nodded indifferently—he who had played, with beads of perspiration on his forehead, only yesterday, watching every stake as though it had been a matter of life or death.

"Yes, I've won," he admitted. "What about some

tea, Sister Judith? Let's find a corner in the bar, or shall we go somewhere and dance?"

His eyes sought hers eagerly, devouringly. She was gracious, but with a certain restraint in her manner, which he was at first too happy to appreciate.

"I've come to play," she told him. "We'll have some tea first, though, if you like."

Londe strolled off and the young man eagerly carried Judith away to a corner table in the bar. He had lost all his nervous incoherence of the night before. He plunged at once into superlatives. He made open and unabashed love to her. He was eager, impetuous, almost compelling. She, on her part, was all the time gracious. She at no time rebuked him, but he felt, somehow or other, conscious of a barrier which had not been there on the preceding day. He refused to accept the possibility of its existence, however. He laughed to scorn the idea of failure.

"You are an ardent lover to-day," she murmured, "but I have come to see you play. Remember, you must win."

He suffered himself to be led, reluctantly, into the rooms. At seven o'clock he had won half a million francs.

"You must dine with me, both of you," he insisted.

Londe accepted eagerly. Judith seemed a little bored at the prospect.

"I shall have to go home and dress," she said. "However, I suppose——"

"Nine o'clock at the Hotel de Paris," Brookes interrupted. "I shall have a little surprise for you."

The dinner was a banquet—wine, food, flowers, thanks to the genius of the *maître d'hôtel,* were all the most perfect of their sort. Brookes was an eager host, almost handsome in his light-hearted gaiety, with a new colour in his cheeks, a freshness which made him seem years younger, a constant stream of conversation, a complete lack of background. Londe, immensely interested, was an appreciative guest. Judith, on the other hand, occasionally showed signs of a wandering attention. Several times she smiled across the room at a table where a young Frenchman, an acquaintance from the Club, was dining alone. Once Brookes intercepted her glance, and broke off in the middle of a sentence. The stem of the wineglass which he was holding snapped in his fingers, a look of black fury darkened his face. Londe watched him with the delighted interest of the scientific investigator. Judith laughed at him.

"He's such a dear," she murmured—"the Vicomte d'Aix. He's all alone, too. Why don't you ask him to have coffee with us?"

"I don't want to," Brookes answered sullenly. "I don't like him."

Judith made a little grimace.

"Very well then, let's go," she suggested, rising to her feet at the same moment as the Vicomte. "We'll have our coffee at the Club. You men needn't hurry unless you like. The Vicomte will take me."

Brookes seized the menu and tore it in half. Londe watched his distorted face with a pleased and understanding interest.

"A capricious person, my wife, I am afraid," he

sighed. "She is scarcely sufficiently grateful for our delightful dinner. May I suggest that we try a glass of eighteen eighteen brandy? We can compare it with what I gave you last night."

"Damn last night, and you, and your wife!" was the insolent reply.

Londe only laughed.

The young man's opportunity was long in coming. He had won many thousands of francs and drank many liqueur brandies before he found Judith temporarily alone. He drew her into the bar.

"I am not sure that I want to come in here again," she complained, a little peevishly. "I want to play."

"Presently," he said. "I have something for you."

She settled down with an air of resignation.

"Do you know that I have won six hundred thousand francs," he confided.

She nodded.

"Well?"

He drew a little packet from his pocket, opened the grey morocco case, and the glitter of diamonds flashed out into the room. She leaned forward negligently and made a little grimace.

"Diamonds!" she exclaimed disparagingly. "I hate them. Whatever made you spend your money on jewels set in such a ridiculous fashion?"

He shut up the case with a snap. His expression for a moment was almost terrible.

"I bought them for you," he declared fiercely. "I won my money for you. I have become as you and your husband are for your sake."

She looked at him disdainfully.

"You're a fool," she exclaimed. "You might have had a chance before. You have none now."

"What do you mean?" he gasped. "I did it for your sake."

"Idiot!" she scoffed.

"I only half believed what your husband told me," he went on, "but I know now that it's the truth. I feel the difference every moment. I have a mind without a background, a brain, feeling, passion—all without a soul. It was for you."

She laughed at him contemptuously.

"You should have known better," she told him. "Your only attraction to me was—that you were on the other side of the border. You were sane. Now you are just like us. You do not interest me. Run away, please, and take your diamonds. The Vicomte is coming and I want to talk to him."

Brookes rose to his feet and walked out of the place, hatless, and without a word to the servant whom he passed. He crossed the road, descended a little way and sprang on to the top of the wall. For a moment he stood there, poised—a horrible sight. Then he dived downwards into space.

Ann brought the newspaper, containing the brief notice of the young man's suicide, to Daniel one morning a few days later.

"I thought the concluding portion of this rather strange, Mr. Rocke," she said.

Daniel adjusted his spectacles and read. The paragraph was headed:

UNUSUAL SUICIDE AT MONTE CARLO.

The body of a well-dressed young man, subsequently identified as Mr. Ernest Brookes, a tea-planter from Ceylon, was yesterday picked up on the quay at Monte Carlo. He appears to have jumped from the parapet above and broken his neck. Notes and plaques amounting to over half a million francs were discovered upon his person, besides some valuable jewels. His only acquaintances in Monte Carlo seem to have been a Mr. and Mrs. Broadbent, who had dined with him at the Hotel de Paris on the night in question. They, however, are unable to throw any light upon the mystery.

"It is curious, of course, but why should you think that it might interest us?" Daniel enquired.

She pointed to an additional paragraph, a little lower down. Daniel took up the paper again and read:

From the evidence of the valet at the hotel where the deceased was staying, it appears that he had dined on the previous evening at the villa occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Broadbent, and that he was brought home late at night by his host, apparently in a state of intoxication. On the following morning, however, the young man was unusually well, but suffering from what appeared to be loss of memory. He was exceedingly cheerful during the day, but complained occasionally of dizziness. He appears to have confided to the valet, whilst dressing for dinner, that he had been made the victim of some sort of experiment, which was likely to affect his brain. A few minutes later he absolutely denied having made any such statement

and continually contradicted himself. The valet, who was also the person who helped him to his rooms on the previous evening, declares that the deceased showed no signs of intoxication, but gave him the impression of having been drugged. No further light can be thrown upon the mystery at present, as it seems that Mr. and Mrs. Broadbent have unexpectedly left Monte Carlo.

"Very queer," Daniel murmured, his fingers straying towards the A.B.C. "'Broadbent' is a very common name."

"And easily assumed," Ann replied. "The train goes at two-thirty."

"Another wild-goose chase, I suppose," Daniel grumbled. "At any rate we shall get a little sunshine."

IX

THE BORGIA TOUCH

THE whole Riviera from Hyères to Monaco lay basking in a glorious flood of spring sunshine. The mimosa was in full bloom and the flowering shrubs from the villas around Cap Martin shook their voluptuous fragrance into the softly moving air. From her balcony, Judith leaned, in an exquisite *négligé,* and hummed joyfully the strain of the Neapolitan ditty which was then the air of the moment in the cafés—a song of love, and flowers, and passion. She looked over her shoulder and called back through the French windows:

"Hurry, Joseph! I've something to show you."

Londe presently appeared. He had just finished shaving and he wore a silk dressing gown—a gorgeous purple-coloured garment with an embroidered girdle about his waist. He turned his face seaward for a moment and drew in a long breath of the lemon-scented air. Afterwards he looked down at the little quay, close to which a yacht lay at anchor.

"The south wind has gone, then," he observed, with satisfaction. "I like it better when the *Judith* lies close at hand."

"Pooh!" she laughed. "You never forget."

He turned and seated himself at the round breakfast

table, whose dainty appurtenances glittered in the sunlight.

"Well, what is it you want to show me?" he asked absently, watching the curve of Judith's white arm as she lifted the coffeepot.

With the other hand she pushed an illustrated paper across to him, and pointed proudly to the open page.

"Me!" she exclaimed. "What do you think of me, Joseph? Am I not beautiful?"

He stared at the full-length picture, for a moment, blankly. It was a photograph of Judith, taken at a happy moment—Judith, exquisitely gowned, brilliant, happy. A man in tennis clothes was standing talking to her. It was entitled—"Mrs. Broadbent and the Vicomte d'Aix, on the tennis courts at Monte Carlo."

"You let them take this?" he muttered, staring at the picture with fascinated eyes.

"Why not?" she answered happily. "See how beautiful I look, Joseph. It was a Poiret gown. And the lace hat—Élise says herself that no one can wear those hats as I do."

"How shall you like to wear the asylum clothes again?" he asked roughly.

"Asylum! Joseph, don't be horrible," she exclaimed.

"I mean it," he went on, his voice shaking with suppressed anger. "Coarse flannel next your skin, a bath with yellow soap once a week, and a serge covering like a sack to wrap around your body."

She began to sob. She was like a child who has been scolded.

"Don't you suppose they'll see that picture in London, and know that we are back in Monte Carlo?"

he went on bluntly. "Don't you remember that we have enemies, the business of whose life it is to track us down? Worton, through whom I might have been a sane man at this moment, if you hadn't interfered, with your accursed susceptibility. Worton and the grubbing cipher reader, who escaped at the last moment, and the girl who had a father. Don't you know they are hunting for us, all of them? They are fools, but even fools blunder into success sometimes. They were here looking for us, only in January, because of that affair of the young man. We have had a rest—two months, practically in hiding. Now, directly we get back again where there are some interests in life for me, you beckon to them, back in England, to come and start the chase again. You fool! Can't you realise that there isn't one of them who won't recognise that picture? Your brain must be shrivelling, day by day."

She sprang away from him. Her beautiful eyes were still wet with tears and her lips quivering.

"I am very sorry, Joseph," she sobbed. "You know that sometimes I don't think. It seems to get more difficult every day, and I cannot remember. Of course it was very foolish of me. That awful place! It comes back to me now. Horrible! Horrible!"

She wrung her hands. He contemplated her with gloomy satisfaction. Her agony pleased him.

"You're getting worse," he pronounced. "You're getting more childish every day. The world fades away from you."

"It is true," she faltered. "There are times when I cannot think, when I feel the clouds coming. Save

me, Joseph! You are so clever. You can do something!"

He remained motionless and thoughtful. From the gardens of the next villa came the twanging of a guitar, and the sound of gay voices, a little reckless, a little passionate, preaching the doctrine of love with all abandonment. The sun was growing warmer, the faint scent of the sea mingled with the more sensuous odours of the flowers.

"Nobody can do anything for you," he pronounced pitilessly. "Your days for thought are past. You must cling to the sensations of the moment. Make the best of them, for there is nothing else in life for you. If, by any chance," he went on, "they get you back again through this"—he touched the picture—"and they take away all your soft clothes and luxuries, you will be a screaming lunatic in a week."

"Don't let them take me, Joseph," she pleaded. "Don't let them!"

He sat with clenched fists, gazing over the Mediterranean, seeing nothing of its gorgeous patches of blue, the pools of light and glittering jewel-strewn sheen. He tasted the whole bitterness of foreknowledge.

"Of what account are you, after all?" he muttered. "Here am I, a different order of being altogether—fit for any position in the world, save for that one tiny clot of madness, one evil pin-prick, which nothing can move. I could be a master of science. I have all the knowledge those others strive for. I have vision. I was made to be their master. And, here I am, all the time dodging fate, with the cunning of a lunatic, waiting for the hand upon my shoulder, the grim

sentence of my fellows! I, their chief, the lord of all knowledge!"

She was almost in hysterics now.

"Don't let them take me, Joseph!" she cried, again and again.

He pointed to the paper.

"You!" he scoffed. "What do you matter? A butterfly without a soul, a thing of beauty, all husk and show, risking hell for both of us to gratify your vanity."

"I didn't think, indeed, I didn't think," she pleaded. "The camera man was there. It was all over before I could turn."

He waved her away. He was thinking again.

"They will be here directly," he reflected. "The bespectacled pedant—a fool still, but getting wiser with the experience of many failures—the girl with the angry eyes, and the aristocratic policeman. They are none of them very clever, but they will get us some day. They hang on. They will be here, perhaps this morning."

"You are cleverer than they are, Joseph," she moaned. "You always win. There is the car ready, the yacht, or shall we fly? We can fly from Nice."

"My time for winning draws near to an end," he declared, with a somewhat ominous note of prophecy in his tone. "I have heard the warning. I have heard the footsteps amongst the hills, the footsteps upon wool, passing over the hills, coming downwards, always downwards. What have I done evil? I, who saved thousands of lives. It is that missing atom of brain. If I had that I should know."

"I was a fool," she sobbed.

Suddenly the villa gates swung to. The sound of horses' hoofs reached their ears from the drive. She lifted her head eagerly, expectantly. All the gloom and sorrow had passed. She clapped her hands.

"It is Armand," she cried. "It is the Vicomte. How beautifully he rides, and what a lovely horse!"

Londe rose to his feet.

"Amuse yourself with him for a time," he advised. "I must go and think. I must decide whether we disappear, or face the storm."

Ann stepped off the train at Monte Carlo, with fifty pounds in her pocket, a single trunk, containing in chief her two evening gowns, one afternoon toilette, and a revolver. She engaged a room at a small hotel, took out her tickets for the Salon Privé and the Sporting Club, and paid a visit to an official of the place. He received her politely, but without enthusiasm.

"You will not know my name," she said, "but I am, as a matter of fact, the advanced guard of a small Commission, who are coming out here to try and effect the arrest of a dangerous criminal whom we believe to be living in the place."

It was an unfortunate start. Officials at Monte Carlo do not like to be told that their Principality could possibly harbour members of the criminal fraternity.

"Indeed, Mademoiselle," was the civil but cold reply. "Perhaps you can tell me the names of the members of this Commission to which you allude?"

"One is Sir Francis Worton," she replied, "who is the head of the Home Branch of the English Secret

Service. He is bringing an emissary from Scotland Yard with him, and there is also another gentleman, Mr. Daniel Rocke, a friend of Sir Francis'."

"Do you know the name of this supposed criminal?" the official asked.

"He passes under the name of 'Broadbent'," she confided. "His wife's picture was in the *Tatler* this week."

Her companion smiled a little superciliously.

"It happens," he remarked, "that we have recently investigated the antecedents of the gentleman in question. We discovered nothing against him. Mr. and Mrs. Broadbent are very valued and welcome visitors to the Principality."

Ann frowned.

"That man who calls himself Broadbent is a murderer and a lunatic," she declared. "He was responsible for the death of one young man here a few months ago. We came over then directly we read about the case, but both Mr. and Mrs. Broadbent had disappeared."

"Mademoiselle," the official said patiently, "the circumstances concerning the death of that young man have been fully enquired into. There is not the slightest foundation for the statement which you have just made."

Ann checked a somewhat hasty reply.

"Why did they leave the place, then, the day after the young man's suicide?" she demanded.

"Their leaving the place was a perfectly natural happening," was the civil but cold rejoinder. "Mrs. Broadbent was naturally very much upset, and the doc-

tor ordered her an immediate change. As to their being in hiding, they were, I believe, in Rome the whole of the time. I remember now that one of the gentlemen, of whom you have been speaking, came to make enquiries here. We told him then that we could discover nothing against either this gentleman or his wife. They have come back here quite openly, and until official representations are made to me, I shall do nothing to interfere with their comfort."

"Will you permit me, sir, to tell you the history of this man and his wife?" Ann persisted.

"Another time, Mademoiselle," was the hasty answer. "There are demands upon me this morning."

"The man has been in a lunatic asylum," she declared indignantly. "He has committed three murders."

"These incidents do not appear in the *dossier* of James Broadbent which we have," the official assured her, smiling. "Mademoiselle, you will permit me to wish you good morning. I will receive your friends when they arrive if they should care to pay me a visit."

Ann was repulsed. For the first time she doubted the wisdom of the impulse which had made her leave London at a moment's notice, upon seeing the picture. Daniel, as it chanced, had been away in Somersetshire, Sir Francis was in Ireland, and no one at Scotland Yard was willing to move without more definite information than she was able to give. She had sent off desperate telegrams, and herself caught the first possible train. Now that she was here, it seemed that there was nothing she could do. For the first time,

too, she appreciated the almost brilliant cunning of the man who had escaped them so often, who did not even take a pseudonym with which he was not prepared to link a perfectly connected and irreproachable past. She was inclined to be depressed as she walked disconsolately through the clean, attractive streets, with their crowds of lounging pleasure seekers—little groups whose hearts and spirits seemed touched by the sunshine. She had some idea of going back to her hotel. Then a seat outside the Café de Paris, a smiling waiter, her favourite air from "Thaïs" played by the red-coated band, decided her fate. She sat down and ordered a Dubonnet, herself becoming one of the gay throng. And at the next table sat Londe!

He was seated sideways to her, a little turned away, and she realised from the first the futility of any attempt at escape. She was content to study him for a few minutes. He was perfectly dressed, in the negligent fashion of the place, in well-fitting grey tweeds, grey Homburg hat, and brown shoes. His beard was carefully trimmed, his complexion and alert manner showed no signs of decadence, nor of evil conscience. His tie was fastened by a single pearl pin. He was talking eagerly and forcefully to his two companions, men of middle age and professional appearance, who seemed to listen to him with the utmost respect. They were talking in French, and, so far as Ann could gather, of some abstruse scientific subject. She listened in wonder to Londe's unhesitating stream of conversation. He was evidently holding forth on some subject on which he was an authority. Then suddenly, without any warning, he turned round in his chair,

and looked her full in the face. He rose at once to his feet and bowed courteously without a shadow of embarrassment or disturbance.

"My dear young lady!" he exclaimed. "This is most delightful—a charming surprise. Permit me to present Monsieur le Professeur Trenchard, of Paris. Docteur Coppet, the resident physician here. Miss Ann Lancaster."

Londe's manner was perfect. There was no escape, scarcely an alternative. In less than a minute Ann found herself seated between the other two men, her glass of Dubonnet replenished, the guest of the man who had killed her father, the man whom she knew to be a lunatic with death always at his finger tips—the man whom she had come to destroy.

"You are fortunate in your acquaintance with Mr. Broadbent," Docteur Coppet remarked to her in an undertone. "He is certainly one of the most brilliant men of the day. Professeur Trenchard has come all the way from Paris to see him, after studying a paper of his on 'comparative lunacy.'"

"I have heard that he was an authority on the subject," Ann murmured.

"The greatest—I should say the greatest," the doctor confided enthusiastically. "It is a privilege to have been able to make his acquaintance here."

Londe brought his scientific discussion to an abrupt conclusion and turned courteously to Ann.

"Are your friends—er—with you, Miss Lancaster?" he enquired.

"Not yet," she answered. "They are following—perhaps to-morrow."

"I see," he murmured. "You are here for the purpose of making preliminary investigations."

"Precisely."

"And you expect them to-morrow, did I understand you to say?"

"They may be delayed until the next day," she replied. "They are certainly coming."

"And in the meantime you are alone?"

"I am alone," Ann admitted.

"You must dine with us to-night at the villa," Londe suggested. "I am sure my wife will be charmed."

The sound of music and the gay voices around seemed suddenly to die away. She felt herself struggling in the throes of a horrible nightmare. It seemed incredible that this man, the horror of her life, should be sitting here, mixing with his fellow creatures, lightheartedly, with dignity, and even condescension; that he should be asking her without the slightest sign of hesitation to accept his hospitality. It was grotesque and incredible.

"I am afraid——" she began.

"I shall take no refusal," Londe interrupted cheerfully. "To-night, as it happens, we entertain a little company of friends. Monsieur le Professeur, Monsieur le Docteur here, the Vicomte d'Aix—well, there may be others, but of these I know. We certainly shall not leave you alone at your hotel."

"My experience of your hospitality——" she began, trying not to tremble.

He laughed at her.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "life is a great game, and

to taste its full savour one should be prepared for the unexpected, one should have the courage always to face it. You shall be fetched at eight o'clock by the Vicomte d'Aix. He is a harmless youth who adores my wife. He shall also conduct you home. May I know at what hotel?"

"The St. James," she murmured.

"It is arranged," Londe declared, rising to his feet.

A moment later she was wondering whether it were not a dream. Three distinguished-looking men—Londe himself, perhaps, with his burly frame and assured air, the most noticeable—were strolling away towards a waiting motor-car. She watched him—the central figure—with absorbing curiosity. He was apparently well known. A gendarme saluted, a lady bowed, a man and woman waved their salute from across the road. He bore himself with dignity—almost with condescension—her father's murderer, a lunatic criminal, a man who had baffled the police a dozen times and to secure whom they were even now rushing hotfoot across France. She herself had travelled without food or sleep to urge the police on to his track. And he apparently welcomed her with pleasure, had asked her to dine at the Villa, had behaved with the courtesy of a man of the world, had ignored with the most perfect diplomacy the blood feud which lay between them. It was incredible.

The remainder of the day passed restlessly. There came no word from Daniel at the hotel, not even the telegram she had expected to let her know that he had started. At seven o'clock she changed into the more impressive of her simple evening toilettes. She made

up her mind that if the Vicomte called for her she would go. She would leave word at the office where she was, and if there were no other guests she would decline to stay. There could be no risk. The Vicomte was a well-known young Frenchman of fashion. She would go with him and return with him. Even Daniel could not disapprove, and she would be able to spy out the land; she would be able to decide whether his attitude was a magnificent bluff, or whether it were really his intention to stand firm, to entrench himself behind his great fame and risk the whole truth becoming known.

At eight o'clock she descended to the lounge and, a few minutes later, a very elegantly turned-out young man, whom she recognised by his picture as the Vicomte, entered and, after looking around, approached her, hat in hand.

"I have the honour to address Mademoiselle Lancaster?" he enquired.

"That is my name," she admitted, rising. "I suppose you are the Vicomte d'Aix."

He bowed low.

"I have the privilege to escort you to the Villa Violette," he announced.

"I am quite ready," she replied.

So far he was entirely canonical. She took her place by his side in the small but luxurious limousine. They drove off in silence.

"You are very well acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Broadbent?" Ann ventured presently.

"I can scarcely call myself an old friend," he admitted, "but I visit them a great deal. I think that

Madame Broadbent is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my life."

"I shall be interested to meet her again," Ann observed.

"She is like a wonderful flower unfolding a little further every day," the young man continued enthusiastically. "She is entrancing."

"How do you get on with her husband?" Ann asked bluntly.

The young man's attitude showed that he regarded the question as not being altogether in the best of taste.

"Monsieur Broadbent is a man of science," he pointed out. "I respect him greatly. We are not on intimate terms. I do not call him my friend."

"Do you know whether they are leaving Monte Carlo soon?" Ann enquired.

"I have heard no mention of their doing so," the Vicomte replied. "I trust not."

At the villa they were received with some ceremony. A butler welcomed them in the hall. Two other men-servants were in evidence. An irreproachable-looking maid took charge of Ann. The whole atmosphere of the place was normal. In the little drawing-room her last apprehensions vanished. The Professeur from Paris was already there, the local doctor, Londe and his wife. Ann gave a little gasp as she shook hands with her hostess. The Vicomte had not exaggerated. Judith, in her gown of pale blue velvet, a rope of pearls around her neck, her beautiful hair becomingly arranged, youth and health alight in her face, was indescribable. She seemed scarcely more than twenty-five years of age, and she had the conquering presence

of a woman at whose feet the world lay. Her welcome to Ann was kindly but indifferent. She had the air of never having seen her before. They went in to dinner almost at once.

For ever afterwards that meal remained a hazy memory with Ann. Its appurtenances were all, of their kind, perfect—the lighting, the food, the wine, the noiseless service. One or other of the guests talked to her and she replied, glibly enough, but mechanically. She could not keep her eyes away from Londe. He was at once the perfect host, the savant, the courtier. He kept Professeur Trenchard interested, at times almost excited, yet he never allowed the general conversation to flag. He dropped a valuable hint to the doctor as to one of his cases, explained minutely the only safe system at roulette by the use of which heavy loss was impossible, and smilingly acknowledged that his own large winnings were solely a matter of chance, that he had not the patience himself to play upon any system at all. The meal drew to an end. At Londe's request coffee and liqueurs were served at the table. With only two women, he suggested, an adjournment was unsociable. A little haze of cigarette smoke hung about the table. Conversation grew louder at one end, softer at the other. The Vicomte was leaning towards Judith. Her eyes shone like brilliant but unspeaking stars through the haze.—And then Ann was suddenly conscious that she was struggling against a curiously potent sense of sleepiness. The voices around her died away, became louder again, and then receded like the waves of the sea. Her eyes ached, her head dropped. She felt herself mumbling an apology. She

lurched a little forward. Once more the voices had gone. There was silence—relief.

The awakening was the most wonderful thing she had ever known. It came suddenly and without a start, just as though she had opened her eyes after a long night's sleep in her own bed. She sat up and looked around her, dazed and incredulous. The most amazing thing of all was that she was still at the dinner table. The sunlight was shining full into the room, paling the electric light, giving a strange impression of debauchery to the remains of the dessert, the half-filled wine and liqueur glasses, the cigarette ashes on the plates. Opposite to her, as though aroused by her movement, the doctor opened his eyes and gazed wonderingly around. The Professeur followed suit. The Vicomte, with a little groan, staggered to his feet. Only two places at the table were empty—the places of Londe and his wife.

"Why, it's morning," the Vicomte exclaimed.

"What is this thing which has happened to us all?" the Professeur cried.

Then they saw a piece of paper pinned to the tablecloth in front of Londe's place. The Professeur seized and read it aloud:

The Borgias provided sometimes strange entertainment for their guests. We, of the modern world, follow mildly in their footsteps. Both my wife and I, hating farewells, have chosen this means of bidding all our friends adieu, and to the Professeur particularly I bequeathe this memory of the dreamless night which I trust he will spend, an example of the effect of the drug we were discussing this afternoon.—Tartuffe."

The Professeur was a man of science first and a human being afterwards. His mind was entirely occupied with his own sensations.

"It is amazing," he declared. "I must have gone off to sleep in ten seconds. I had no dreams. I have slept like a child."

"I have certainly lost some patients," the doctor grumbled. "It is eight o'clock and I may have been wanted a dozen times. A foolish joke!"

"Joke!" the Vicomte cried bitterly. "Mon Dieu! If it is true that they have gone, I am a broken man."

Ann threw open the French windows. A little breath of flower-scented breeze swept in, mingled with the flavour of the sea. On the horizon the white hull of a yacht glittered in the sunshine. She pointed towards it.

"There is the real humour of the situation," she cried bitterly. "The worst of it is that no one but myself can appreciate it."

The butler threw open the door.

"*Le petit déjeuner* is served upon the terrace, Madame et Messieurs," he announced.

X

THE DEAD MAN'S TALE

AN hour before dawn the deep silence of the night was broken by the melancholy call of the crested herons roosting in the fir trees of the hotel gardens at Algeciras. A man who had been standing motionless on the stone balcony of a small villa, his pale face and white shirt front gleaming against the heavy darkness, turned abruptly away and disappeared into the room behind. He adjusted the electric light with unsteady fingers. The woman whose graceful shape lay outlined underneath the bedclothes, woke with a yawn. She looked at the man and the sleepiness vanished from her eyes. She sat up in bed and gazed at him a little petulantly.

"Joseph," she exclaimed. "What is wrong? Haven't you been to bed all night?"

He made no answer, and the longer the silence the nearer her petulance grew to anger and alarm.

"Is it the end?" she cried, throwing off the silken coverlet and swinging herself on to the side of the bed. "What has happened? I hear nothing."

The man spoke. His voice sounded hard and cracked. He had lost the splendid imperturbability of conscious power.

"Judith," he confessed, "I have spent horrible hours. A thought like an adder has stolen into my brain. Am *I* mad? Are *we* both mad?"

"Mad!" she repeated, looking hard at him.

"What have we done? Why are we hiding? My brain is full of hazy thoughts. I have had the surgeon's nightmare. I dreamed that I operated on sound men, that my knife was always seeking for their brains, for some phantasmal reason."

She wrapped her dressing gown around her. She was shivering with cold.

"Phantasmal!" she repeated. "Why do you stay out in the dark and brood when bed is warm and sleep is good? You are the greatest surgeon in the world," she went on soothingly. "You have only done what you had a right to do. Undress, and come and sleep, Joseph."

"A right!" he repeated, his eyes fixed and glaring. "Judith, for a moment it seemed to me as though a shutter had been lifted from before my eyes. Why did we leave Dredley? What became of that young man, a waiter at Shoreborough, who brought me my *Lancet,* and the boy who was bicycling across Salisbury Plain? Then there was that Worton man, too, and the cipher reader who escaped. Why were they all so terrified? I have heard their screams coming across the bay as I stood out in the darkness. What was it all about, Judith?"

"It was nothing," she assured him. "You only asked of ungrateful men—you, who have saved hundreds of lives—you only asked of one or two of them a moment upon the table, a flick of the knife."

"But why?" he persisted. "I can't remember why."

"To repair the damage to your own brain," she reminded him wonderingly. "The little discoloured spot. Only wherever you search there is always the patch of red. Do you remember how disappointed you were?"

"The patch of red," he repeated. "Stop! It is true, then. I *am* mad."

"You terrify me," she muttered, watching him stealthily.

"I have been mad," he groaned. "The very idea you speak of is the idea of a madman. I have murdered innocent people."

"Pooh!" she scoffed. "Only one or two. Most of them escaped. Think of the thousands whose lives you saved. Lie down and rest. You're making yourself ill about a trifle."

"If it is a trifle," he answered hoarsely, "how is it that we plot and scheme and hide? How is it that we go always in terror, always hiding from these men, from the girl?"

"They are our enemies," she declared, with quick explanation. "They are very unreasonable people—and I liked the soldier, too. It was my fault that you did not kill him. Some day we must get rid of them all and have peace."

"Peace!" he muttered. "Peace!"

She threw off her dressing gown and curled herself up in bed again.

"You make my head ache," she complained. "I have never been able to think much since the guns

stopped. Come to bed, Joseph, or go to your own room. I am weary."

He turned away. Already her eyes were closed and she was breathing regularly, sleeping like a child, ignorant of evil, full of confidence in the morrow. And on the morrow he had forgotten.

When morning came she had conceived a wonderful idea. They breakfasted in a sunny corner of the balcony. She wore a rose-coloured wrap, loosely fastened at the waist with a silken girdle, and the rich glory of her hair shone golden in the warm flood of light. Nevertheless she had not altogether forgotten. She leaned back in her seat and studied him. He was looking pinched and white. He was losing flesh and his eyes had sunken. He was like a man with whom the shadow of a great fear sometimes dwelt. She, on the other hand, seemed to be still inheriting her unexpected gift of marvellous beauty. Her skin was as soft as satin, her eyes were rich and full, her mouth scarlet and alluring. But what little soul there had been in her face had gone. She was like a beautiful pagan.

"You seem tired," she observed, fencing of a subtle purpose, to see if he would speak of the night before.

"I slept ill," he confessed. "Very ill. The night was full of shadows and nightmares."

"Do you remember them?" she asked.

"No," he answered, "only vaguely. Yet, there's one thing I'm sure of—the whole world stinks of ingratitude. I know that I am in danger just because I seek to repair the brain I gave to my country."

"Listen," she enjoined. "I have been thinking. I am going now to dress. Be ready to walk with me when I return. I have an idea."

Presently they climbed the hill at the back of the villa, a bare, stony place, with a few palm trees here and there, and a belt of cactus. Towards the top, leaning to the sun, was a square enclosure, bordered by a white wall, and containing a hundred or more graves, some new, some old, some adorned with faded flowers, some neglected. They leaned over the wall and she laid her hand upon his arm.

"Now listen to me, Joseph," she said. "These people all make such stupid trouble over a trifle. Why not the brain of a dead man? There could be no trouble, no offence against the laws."

His eyes were bright as steel, hard and eager.

"A dead man!" he repeated.

"Why not?" she argued. "Can't you see that you will have even a better chance. The scarlet patch will have faded with death."

"True!" he exclaimed eagerly. "Quite true! A dead man would do. If it were within twenty-four hours there would be no danger whatever."

"There you are, then," she cried, with a little wave of the hand. "The ghosts cannot rise against us."

"Wonderful!" he muttered, looking eagerly over the wall. "But how to get them? They bury deep in Spain."

She clutched his arm, drew him round, and pointed down below to a hovel by the seashore, a plastered structure, thatch-covered and banked with weeds. A couple of goats were tethered to a line, two or three

small pigs scampered about, a weary-looking mule with great panniers waited patiently. There were fishing nets spread out in front. On the beach a few yards away a small fishing boat, with a black sail, rode at anchor.

"You know what they call the three men who live alone there?" she reminded him. "The three devils. They have all been in prison. They are all outcasts. The respectable fishermen will have nothing to say to them. Let them do your work on dark nights, and afterwards—when you have finished—they can sail out beyond the bay and drop what remains into the bottom of the Mediterranean."

He looked at her almost with reverence.

"Judith," he confessed, "I have sometimes done you a wrong in my thoughts. You have had a great idea—a wonderful idea," he added portentously. "If I can once be sane again, even for one year, no one will ever raise a finger against me, because I can show the world things it never even dreams of now. I am all the time on the threshold of great discoveries. I can abolish disease, I can extend the span of human life. All that I need is just that missing gleam of reason. I must have it! I will have it!"

She drew him down the hillside.

"The brothers are there, all three of them," she pointed out. "Your Spanish is good enough to make them understand. There is not one of them who would not sell his soul for a few pesetas."

"They shall have more than a few pesetas," he cried excitedly. "They shall be my men."

Colonel Sir Francis Worton, K.C.B., D.S.O., was giving a small farewell party at Mario's famous club restaurant in London, at which Daniel Rocke and Ann were the only guests. The wine was good, the dinner excellent, and everybody, on the surface at any rate, was cheerful. The centre of the room was being cleared for dancing.

"So we're going to lose you for a time, Sir Francis," Ann remarked.

He nodded, a little gloomily.

"The doctor insists," he said. "I haven't any particular desire to go. In fact, I would rather stay in England just now."

"I can't think why," she observed, with a little shiver. "Think of the rain and sleet outside. Three dreary months ahead of us. Ugh!"

"I could tell you why," he whispered, leaning towards her.

"Where are you going to?" she asked quickly.

"To Gibraltar," he replied. "My cousin is Governor there, and I shall stay with him for a day or two and afterwards at Algeciras. Do you remember who this is?"

Ann glanced at the little party of new arrivals. Foremost amongst them, very correctly dressed, very good-looking, still a little self-satisfied, came Captain Milton, the Chief Constable of Shoreborough. He strolled across towards them as soon as the other members of the party had found seats and exchanged casual greetings.

"So the miracle happened after all," Sir Francis re-

minded him, a little drily. "The petrol boat was never heard of again."

"I won't admit the miracle," was the prompt reply. "I said that escape for that man and woman was an impossibility. All reasonable harbours and landing places were barred to them. There was nothing to prevent their making for the mid-Atlantic, though, and dying of hunger or thirst, or being swamped."

"You think, then, that that is what happened?" Daniel asked.

"There isn't the slightest doubt about it," the other answered confidently. "The whole area of coast which they could possibly have reached with the capacity of that boat was scoured—everywhere except the bottom of the sea—and I never proposed to go down there to arrest them—outside my sphere of activities, that!"

"I saw both the man and the woman alive and well a few months ago," Ann observed.

"God bless my soul!" Milton exclaimed incredulously. "Where?"

"They spent last winter in Monte Carlo," Ann told him.

"The same people? You're sure of that?"

"Quite sure. I dined at their villa."

"But surely you did something about it?" he demanded.

"I did what I could," Ann replied. "I've come to the conclusion that lunatics are too full of cunning to be dealt with by ordinary human beings like us."

"You mean that they got away again?"

"They got away again," she admitted.

"Must have nine lives, that fellow," Milton ob-

served. "I never saw any one take such a purler as he did from that cliff side, and get up and walk as though nothing had happened.—Suppose I must get back to my people."

He took leave of them with a little bow and sauntered off. There was a momentary silence.

"It is a long time now," Ann said thoughtfully, "since we had the faintest news of them. I wonder whether they are still in Europe."

"They are lying low if they are," Sir Francis rejoined. "There's been nothing doing in the way of murders or disappearances in this country, at any rate."

Daniel left his place presently to speak to some acquaintances at the other side of the room. Ann and her companion sat for an unusual length of time in silence. Suddenly he turned to her.

"Miss Lancaster," he began, "I think you can guess what I'm going to say to you."

"I'm afraid so," she admitted.

"Then I am already answered," he sighed. "I know that I am too old for you, and there must be many obstacles from your point of view, but I think you know how it has been with me lately. I am fonder of you than of any one else in the world. Will you marry me?"

She shook her head. It was a crisis which she had long since despaired of warding off.

"I am so sorry," she told him. "It is very generous of you to ask me, but, you see, I have my own little secret. There is some one else."

"You are engaged?" he asked quickly.

She shook her head.

"I am not engaged because the man I am fond of has never asked me, and I am afraid he won't unless I put it into his head. But, in any case, I have sworn, and I mean to keep my oath, that I will never marry any one whilst Joseph Londe is alive and free."

"Isn't that rather a foolish vow?" he protested. "From your own point of view, I mean. You may miss so many years of happiness—the years that I fear I have missed," he added regretfully.

"I have faith," she answered. "Besides, as I told you, the man whom I marry doesn't know anything about it yet. I'm not sure that he has even thought about me that way."

"For his own sake, I hope he won't wait until it is too late," Worton said a little sadly. "Do you care to dance?"

A week later, when Daniel handed her the following telegram which he had just received from Gibraltar, she knew quite well that her faith was about to be justified:

Come out here by Friday's P. & O. boat from Tilbury. Don't fail me. Have made the great discovery, but may still need your help.

Sir Francis met them in the Governor's brass-funnelled launch, and made his way on board as soon as the great liner had dropped her anchor.

"Well," he exclaimed, as he shook hands, "what did you think of my thunderbolt?"

"We want to know everything, please," Ann begged

"You shall, within half an hour," he promised. "But not a word yet. We are going straight across to Algeciras."

"But——"

"Not a word yet," he insisted. "Tell your bedroom stewards to put your luggage on the launch at once. They want to push us off as quickly as possible. I'll be at the gangway. I promised them we'd be off in five minutes."

In little more than that time they were racing across the deep blue water of the bay. Still Sir Francis would tell them nothing. They were at the pier in a quarter of an hour, through the customs a minute or two later, and drove at once to the hotel. By degrees the sternness left Ann's face, her eyes softened, her lips were parted. The quaintly built hotel, half Spaish, half Moorish, was covered with a magenta creeper. Giant palms stood motionless in the warm tropical atmosphere. Orange trees, laden with fruit, bordered the walls, and everywhere the place seemed to bask in sunshine, warm, golden, invigorating.

"This is paradise," Ann exclaimed enthusiastically.

"With the devil lurking in one corner of it," was their cicerone's grim comment. "Come up to my sitting room."

They followed him upstairs and out on to a quaint stone balcony looking westwards. A marine, who had been standing there with a telescope by his side, sprang at once to attention.

"Guard relieved for a few minutes, Nicholas," Sir Francis announced. "I'll call you when I come in."

"Nothing to report, sir," the man replied, as he disappeared through the French windows.

The three stood side by side in the far corner of the balcony, and Sir Francis pointed to a small white villa, standing out on a spit of land about a mile away towards Tariffa. There were a few orange trees in front and a couple of tall palms. Behind, a strip of garden, with a cactus hedge. It was a plainly built house, but beautifully situated—the waters of the bay lapped the sands, a few yards away from the windows.

"There they are, both of them," he declared, with a glitter in his eyes which few things in life had brought there. "We have them trapped. Why they came here heaven only knows, but I have seen them with my own eyes.—Trapped!"

"We've thought that before," Daniel reminded him.

"This time we are taking no risks," was the confident reply. "Londe is there, like a rat in his hole. An extradition warrant is on its way out now and may arrive at any moment. If he crosses to Gib., he will be arrested on the quay. My cousin has lent me a dozen marines—fine fellows—and two of them are always within fifty yards of his door. There isn't a car in the shed, and both garages have been warned not to let one out on any conditions. Furthermore, there isn't a petrol boat to be had for love or money."

"How did he get here?" Ann asked.

"He landed in Portugal," Sir Francis explained, "probably in the yacht he had at Monte Carlo. I've collected quite a lot of information. He had the yacht painted, altered her name, and sold her to a Jew dealer in Lisbon at half-price, no questions to be asked."

"Has there been any trouble since their arrival?" Daniel enquired.

Sir Francis hesitated.

"Not exactly trouble," he replied, "but something curious has happened. We will speak of that after luncheon. We'll go and see about your rooms now. Afterwards I'll take you for a little walk."

They lunched upon a flagged terrace leading from the dining room, sheltered by a grove of palms, the sun exquisitely warm, the air heavy with the perfume of verbena and lemon trees. Yet each member of the little party was conscious of a certain sense of strain. The subject they so carefully avoided, obsessed them. After coffee and cigarettes, Sir Francis led them through the gardens, along a strip of dusty road, to a bare, rolling stretch of stony land, on which grew little save an occasional cactus plant and a stunted patch of scrub. Halfway down to the sea was a cemetery, enclosed by a white plastered wall, with an occasional minaret of blue stone. A funeral was even then in progress, and a group of black-clad peasants were gathering around an open grave. The solemn words of the prayer, slowly and reverently uttered by the bare-headed priest, reached their ears with curious distinctness. A little apart stood the widow, sobbing bitterly, a stout dark woman, pallid, with a deep growth upon her upper lip, and a fire in her eyes which even her tears could not dim.

"I brought you here because of a curious idea I had," Sir Francis confided, after the ceremony was over and the melancholy little procession had departed. "I think I told you that amongst my few accomplish-

ments is a knowledge of Spanish. I've been very interested during the last week in hearing the gossip of some of these peasants. They say that the devil has been walking in the cemetery. There have been curious footprints and disturbances around the graves. The people here are very superstitious and I was really surprised to see a funeral taking place at all."

Ann shivered a little. It was Daniel who asked the question.

"You think that Londe——"

"I suspect something of the sort," Sir Francis admitted. "One can't pretend to follow the workings of such a brain as his, but one can easily imagine that his craving to use the knife is insatiable. A cemetery close at hand would always be a temptation."

"Horrible!" Ann exclaimed.

"We draw near to the end," Sir Francis said solemnly. "To-morrow I expect the warrant."

But to-morrow brought nothing except a storm from the sea, a grey mistral which sent them shivering indoors, to enjoy the luxury of a wood fire, and kept them there most of the day. In the afternoon came a telegram which Worton tore open eagerly. He passed it over with an air of satisfaction.

"The warrant is granted," he announced. "It will be here to-morrow night."

Even then the sense of restlessness pursued them. A little before dusk they donned mackintoshes and walked out along the sea road to watch the waves break against the quay. At the last bend they came face to face with Judith! They stopped short. So did she. She was wearing a seaman's mackintosh and south-

wester and the rain was dripping from her, but in those few startled seconds the three of them had but the one thought—the amazing beauty of this woman. She carried herself with the grace and freedom of a young goddess, her skin was peachlike in its clearness. She showed not the slightest sign of embarrassment or fear. She looked at no one but Sir Francis, and her eyes glowed as she laughed into his face.

"Have you come for me at last?" she asked. "I expected you long ago. I am ready."

Sir Francis could find no coherent words, but she scarcely waited to listen. She came close to him. Her voice was lowered almost to a whisper, but the music of it remained and the soft invitation of her presence.

"Something has happened to Joseph," she confided. "All day long he sits and mutters. There are terrible things in his eyes. He seems to be surrounded by invisible people whom he is always trying to push away. Sometimes he looks at me as though he hated me. Shall I tell you what I think is coming to him?"

"Tell me," Worton invited.

"I think that he is going sane," she declared. "It is too terrible. I cannot stay with him any longer. The sunshine here warms my heart, makes me feel young and happy, and he is like a frozen statue of horror. I'm glad that you have come at last.—Listen! What's that?"

She broke off in sudden fear. A murmur of voices drifted up to them from the beach. They moved to the side of the road. Below, on the sands, close to the edge of the sea, a group of people were standing round an object that had just been washed ashore.

A man, almost black, from his mixed race and generations of the baking sun, was gesticulating fiercely. He had a black beard, a mass of black hair, a skin withered and scorched—a remnant of his Moorish ancestry. To all appearance he was on the defensive, and there was evil threatening him—evil in the faces and shouting of the little crowd by which he was surrounded. Foremost amongst them was the widow of two days before, a shaking monument of ever-growing fury, her eyes burning fires, her flesh quivering. She seemed to gather the newcomers into her declamation as she swung backwards and forwards an empty sack.

"Listen, all of you, and tell me what it may mean," she cried. "Here was José, husband of mine, father of my boys, buried yesterday. Dead he was, as you all know, of the fever that eats out the heart. Buried he was, as you all saw. And now, behold his corpse washed in from the sea, and his head—Mother of Christ! his dear head!"

"What have I to do with this?" cried Pedro, the man with the black skin of a Moor. "It is the devil who took him from his grave, none other."

"You lie, you foul son of a swine!" the woman shouted, suddenly brandishing the sack in one hand and a knife in the other. "He was washed ashore with this sack tied to him, in which there have been stones, and it is your sack, Pedro—yours, you robber of graves, you mutilator of the dead!"

She sprang at him, her knife a line of glittering fire. Pedro fell on his knees.

"I will tell the truth!" he screamed.

The woman paused. Perhaps, even at the height

of her passion, curiosity prevailed. Pedro pointed to the body.

"It is the Señor at the villa by the sea," he declared. "He gives a thousand pesetas for a dead body, out of which the life has only just gone. It is for the science. See, he comes. Spare your anger, Marguerita, widow of José. It is a hard world and, for a thousand pesetas—why, José himself would have murdered his friend for that!"

The woman seemed tongue-tied. There was a mutter from one or two in the crowd, but no one spoke. Towards them, across the sands, came Londe, quiet, composed, ignorant apparently of what had happened. —Ann found herself shaking in every limb. This must be the end, she told herself. There could be no escape. Her hand touched Daniel's arm and found it tense and hard. In his right hand he was gripping an automatic pistol. Sir Francis had detached himself a little and the light of the hunter was keen in his eyes. So Londe came on to his final end—not death at the hands of Daniel or Worton, men of their word and pledged to kill—but at the hand of the least of his victims. About half a dozen paces from the outskirts of the group, he paused. He probably did not for a moment doubt his ability to quell the tumult, even after Pedro had betrayed him, but he suddenly saw Ann, with Daniel by her side, and Worton in the background. Afterwards they all shared a peculiar conviction with regard to the moments which followed. They saw a sudden gleam of light in Londe's eyes, a terrible self-revealing fire of remorse. The whole expression of his face changed—its strength, the brute

strength of lunacy, failed. They all believed that in those few seconds he was sane, that the curtain of his distorted vision was momentarily raised. If this were indeed so he must have welcomed death. The woman sprang at him with a lightness and force which were amazing. In a flash they saw the thread of steel descending, heard one long drawn-out cry—and that was the end. But, while they stood there paralysed—the woman made sure.

Both Ann and Daniel were conscious of a certain emptiness of outlook on that first morning back in the office. Daniel went through his letters methodically, read the paper for some short time, and rang the bell. Ann came in, notebook in hand.

"There is a paragraph here," he said, "which I think should interest you."

He laid the newspaper upon the desk and pointed with his forefinger. Ann read it over his shoulder:

UNIQUE INCIDENT
at Yesterday's
MEETING OF THE BRITISH MEDICAL SOCIETY.

Yesterday, at the opening of the proceedings of the ninety-fifth meeting of the British Medical Society, the Chairman, Lord Randall, announced that he proposed to establish an altogether unheard-of precedent, by himself reading a paper entitled "The Isolation of Insanity," sent to him, he frankly admitted, by an anonymous correspondent. The paper, a full report of which will be found in another column, created a

great sensation, and if the various theories enunciated can be sustained, will throw an altogether fresh light upon the study of brain failure. It is believed, although no name was attached to the manuscript, that the author was the late Sir Joseph Londe, Bart., who was murdered a short time ago under tragical circumstances at Algeciras.

"Amazing!"

"And, Ann," he went on, "there is a letter here from the solicitor who took charge of Londe's affairs. It seems that there was plenty of money after all. Judith Londe was moved into a private asylum yesterday. They say that she seems quite happy and contented."

"I am glad," she murmured, momentarily startled by his use of her Christian name.

"And, furthermore," he continued, "I have decided to close this office and go round the world."

"Shall you need a secretary?" she asked.

"I should like you to accompany me in another capacity," he replied.

She laid down the book, her hands trembling.

"I am rather a clumsy wooer, I'm afraid," he confessed, "but I want you to come as my wife."

"I don't know about being clumsy," she answered, "but you certainly have been—dilatory."

"You knew all about it without my telling you," he insisted.

"That didn't help much. A woman always likes to be told," was her last word.

THE END